THE THEME OF SUFFERING IN THE NOVELS OF BERNARD MALAMUD

A THESIS

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PREFACE

Mid-twentieth century American fiction is marked by the ascendancy of minority writers. Jewish-American authors, in particular, have achieved the distinction of forming the nucleus of our better contemporary writers.

One such Jewish author, a winner of the National Book fiction award and the Pulitizer Prize, is Bernard Malamud, who in recent years has firmly established his claim to wider recognition and critical attention. However, Malamud has not been the subject of as much literary scholarship as his contemporaries, Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger, and Saul Bellow. Nonetheless, his works, especially his four novels, The Natural, The Assistant, A New Life, and The Fixer, are equally as deserving of analysis and evaluation.

Bernard Malamud has exploited the richness of Jewish experience in his fiction. Not only has he found inspitation in the life of the Jew, but he has also created a mighty theme from his conception of the Jewish experience. However, this writer does not choose to analyze singularly the "Jewishness" of Malamud's novels. She prefers to study the theme of suffering because of its apparent importance in Malamud's fiction. It is, moreover, this writer's contention that suffering is the mighty theme in the four novels since suffering of the human soul takes precedence over the ethnocentricities of Jewish character. Malamud, then, does not confine his novels to shtetl problems, but instead he encompasses universal problems. Through his various uses and statements of the theme, Malamud analyzes the malady of modern life.

Thus, the problems treated are crucial not only to Jewish life but also to modern man.

The writer divides the subject into four chapters. The first presents essential facts about Malamud's world and background, including the significance of his personal and historical experience as an influence on the theme. In the second chapter, the theme of suffering is related to Malamud's conception of modern man. Alienation, isolation, and identity as basic problems of contemporary man and society are studied to show that Malamud's vision of mankind effectively contributes to the theme. Chapter three examines Malamud's attitude toward suffering. The redemptive nature and the universal quality of suffering as well as the necessity, acceptance, and the inevitability of suffering are treated as ideas promulgated by Malamud. The fourth chapter is devoted to examination of the four novels for manifestations of the theme. The diversity and effectiveness of the thematic statement in each novel is illustrated.

It is the writer's hope that this study will illustrate and evaluate the nature of the theme of suffering in Malamud's novels. The writer views this study as an interesting and stimulating task which should result in a fuller appreciation of author Bernard Malamud and, significantly, a deeper insight into his works. Moreover, on a much broader basis, she feels that it should prove to be vital to her understanding of contemporary American fiction and problematic modern man. In the final analysis, the writer hopes that this literary scholarship will be a revealing, a rewarding, and most important, a provocative endeavor for future research in this area of American literature.

The writer of this thesis wishes to acknowledge the helpful guidance of Dr. Richard K. Barksdale, whose interest and advice forwarded the successful completion of this study. Additionally, she wishes to express sincere appreciation to Dr. Thomas D. Jarrett, whose initial encouragement and assistance were responsible for the undertaking and development of this subject.

CHAPTER I

BERNARD MALAMUD'S WORLD

With the publication of The Natural in 1952, Bernard Malamud embarked upon a literary career which subsequently has brought him distinction as one of America's leading contemporary writers. Since the appearance of that first novel, three additional ones, The Assistant (1957), A New Life (1961), and The Fixer (1966), have advanced and secured Malamud's status as one of the best craftsmen in American fiction today.

Thus far, his career as a novelist spans little more than a decade, but it is old enough to be firmly established and, at the same time, young enough to be creatively promising. Curiously, Malamud has been given relatively little critical attention. Although recognized as one of our foremost writers, he has been overlooked, dismissed, or ignored by many serious critics who neglect the deeper implications and fuller significance of his work and limit their critical comment to a cursory evaluation of the Jewish trappings of his novels. For whatever the reasons, critical analysis has not been fully or directly focused upon the literary value of Malamud's novels. Regarding this prevalent failing of much Malamud criticism, Sidney Richman deserves a nod of agreement for the comprehensiveness of his observation:

> In reading some of Malamud's critics, one suspects that it is less his art than his subject which is the center of interest. Too often there is the uneasy sensation that the subject is not really a writer who happens also to be a Jew

but a Jew who happens also to be a writer.[1]

It should be evident by the quality and success of Malamud's work that he is first of all a writer and only incidentally a Jew. Certainly he is extremely sensitive to the plight of the Jew in a callous society; nevertheless, he is equally aware of the problematic components of that society. But the enigma of Malamud criticism seemingly is reducible to the fact that

> Since he writes so well about Jews, and poor ones at that, and since he has succeeded in catching the very life of Yiddish speech better than any of the countless American writers before him, the natural thing to do has been to look for a handle in 'Jewishness' or Sholom Aleichem.[2]

Undeniably, it is interesting -- although not particularly pertinent to his literary achievement -- that Bernard Malamud's rise to recognition coincides with the ascendancy of Jewish American authors. In the last twenty years, a generation of metropolitan Jewish writers has done so much good American writing. For the most part, listings of better fictional writers in the United States at the present include names such as Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, Herbert Gold, and Bernard Malamud, all of whom are of Jewish backgrounds. In fact, out of ten names listed five or six are usually Jewish.[3] Mid-century best-seller lists, in addition to literary awards, substantiate the

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[1]Sidney Richman, Bernard Malamud ("Twayne United States Author Series;" New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p. 19.

[2]Norman Podhoretz, Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing (New York: Noonday Press, 1964), p. 176.

[3]C. P. Snow, "Introduction," The Jew in a Gentile World, ed. Arnold A. Rogow (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. xvii.

fact that a preponderance of Jewish writers currently dominates the best of America's fictional output.

What is important about the rise of Jewish novelists -- other than the theory that their success has led to the over-stressing of Malamud's Jewishness -- is that they have pursued the distant past, the older civilizations, and the elemental emotional life to convey their attitudes toward contemporary experience. Furthermore, they share an imaginative understanding of Jewish issues and expertly relate them to universal problems which deeply appeal to the contemporary consciousness.[1]

Obviously, it is grossly erroneous to consider these artists en masse as Jews, but it is evident that they have exploited the richness of Jewish life and experience either implicitly or explicitly. Malamud, Bellow, and Philip Roth have found "signal inspiration in the life of the Jew," while Mailer, Gold, Salinger, and Harvey Swados have revealed that the Jew is a "peculiarly dramatic symbol for man's struggle in the modern world."[2] These writers have drawn from history and embellished it with their individual sensitivities. They have captured in writing the uniqueness of a minority group and have added that group's values and past to the American image. They have sought to portray the secularization of Jewish morality and the Jew's subsumption into a common humanity.[3] Their Jewish figure, however, symbolizes

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[1]Richman, op. cit., p. 19f.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

[3]Leslie Fiedler, No! In Thunder (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 95.

Everyman. Their prominence and success attest to Ralph Ellison's keen insight into contemporary fiction when he commented:

> Who or what is American are still perplexing questions... all Americans are in this sense members of minority groups, even the Anglo-Saxons, whose image has from the beginning dominated all the rest -- and one meaning of the social fiction in American life is the struggle of each racial, cultural, and religious group to have its own contribution to the national image recognized and accepted.[1]

Thus, each segment of the assimilated American populace longs to add its individuality to the picture of total America. In this respect, the Jews who migrated to America are no different from the Anglican-English or the Catholic-Italian immigrants. The Jews sought and found security and safety from the terrors of persecution and pogroms. Though initially ostracized and ultimately stereotyped by American anti-Semitics, they have been thoroughly absorbed into the mainstream of American life and culture. Now Judaism is one of the three great "Access Roads" to the American Way -- Protestant, Catholic, Jew -- one is as good as another because each becomes ever more vacuously like the others.[2]

Numerically, the American Jewish population of more than five million is the world's largest Jewish population.[3] These five million

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[1]Ralph Ellison, "Society, Morality and the Novel," The Living Novel: A Symposium ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 86.

[2]Allen Guttmann, "Jewish Radicals, Jewish Writers," American Scholar, XXXII (Autumn, 1963), 571f.

[3]Arnold A. Rogow, "Historical Note," The Jew in a Gentile World, p. 219.

people have broken away from the traditional patterns of self-contained existence and, resultantly, have normalized and humanized their lives both materially and spiritually.[1] To a great extent, they have achieved happiness in political, economic, social and cultural aspects of worldly existence.[2] They have found themselves enveloped in a broad humanistic movement which has helped them in the concomitant process of assimilation. In the process, the Jews have contributed to the flow of American life and thought much of the values and many of the ideas associated with ancestral Judaism. As Maurice Samuel has astutely remarked:

> There has passed into the 'assimilated' section of American Jewry, and through it into American life generally, a number of social impulses originating in Kasrielevky. But Kasrielevky, the centre of Sholom Aleichem's world, is not to be equated with all of European or even Russian Jewry as transplanted to America. It is impossible now to disentangle the various threads that have gone into the American pattern.[3]

From sundry places, the Jews have brought to America a product of centuries, a deep and powerful culture. It is their heritage which they have contributed to the assimilated "American Way."

Relatedly, the Jewish writer also has secured a place in American society, and that place is not necessarily a Jewish one. In the last few decades, he has been under no obligation to write as a voice from

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[1] Simon Halkin, Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values (New York: Schocken Books, 1950), p. 16.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Maurice Samuel, The World of Sholom Aleichem (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952), p. 324f.

a minority group. The decay of piety into inter-faith good will in contemporary America has rendered the rejection of the Jew on the grounds of his religion and his "race" more and more negligible.[1] Consequently, the Jewish writer does not have to labor under racial or religious bias. His Jewishness no longer necessitates that he remain apart from the mass as a separate entity. At the present, it is apparent that

> The moment of triumph for the Jewish writer in the United States has come just when his awareness of himself as a Jew is reaching a vanishing point, when the gesture of rejection seems his last possible connection with his historical past.[2]

Yet paradoxically a whole generation of Jewish novelists has reacted to immediate American experiences by choosing subjects, locations, and themes which so apparently emanate from and relate to the historical Jewish experience and character. What they have to say about the human condition they say best when using the Jew as a symbol. Even though racial harmony and cultural assimilation are no longer dreams but realities for American Jews, many Jewish novelists, including Malamud, intentionally recall Yiddish views and conditions which are now a part of the past. They prefer to write from a vantage point outside the pale. Indeed, there is much truth to Leslie Fiedler's belief that "everywhere in the realm of prose, Jewish writers have discovered their Jewishness to be an eminently marketable commodity, their much vaunted alienation to be their passport into the hearts of Gentile

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[1]Fiedler, op. cit., p. 239.

[2]Leslie Fiedler, Waiting for the End (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1964), p. 66.

American culture."[1] In their special experience, they have found a means of relating universal themes to the comformable American image. Additionally, they have found artistic success.

It is against this backdrop that Bernard Malamud lives and writes. Brooklyn born and New York oriented, he received his early training and education in the public school system. He attended the College of the City of New York from which he graduated in 1934. Eight years later, Malamud was awarded a Masters degree from Columbia University. The nine ensuing years he spent teaching English to evening high school students in New York City. He became an assistant professor at Oregon State College in 1949. During his stay as a member of the faculty there, he published an award winning short story collection, The Magic Barrel (1958), and his first three novels, The Natural, The Assistant, and A New Life, which appeared the same year (1961) Malamud departed Oregon State for Bennington College in Vermont. Additionally, he has traveled extensively and lived periodically in several European countries.

Malamud's personal background belies close association with the poverty-ridden, alienated characters of his fiction. His fictional world is far outside the ordinary contingencies of middle class culture. Yet his personal experience as an urban Jew, coupled with the historical experience of Jewish people as a whole, lends weight to a remark made by the author on the occasion of his presentation of the 1966 National Book fiction award for The Fixer, "To produce a mighty book, you must produce a mighty theme . . . I cannot welcome a theory of the novel

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[1] Ibid., p. 65.

that will ultimately diminish the value of a writer's experience, historical and personal, by limiting its use in fiction."[1]

Essentially, Malamud expounds the view that the great novel grows out of the mighty theme, the best of which comes from the writer's personal and historical experience. True to that view, he has constructed the mighty theme from his personal conception of the Jewish experience. As a result, a single, identifiable theme, suffering, recurs in his novels at times as the controlling theme and at others as a persistent undercurrent. Because the theme of suffering unfailingly exemplifies and enriches the development and meaning of numerous related secondary themes, it can be considered his "mighty" theme. Malamud continuously explores that theme, adapting and modifying it to meet the requirements of the specific society which superficially alters but fundamentally remains the same in each novel. The many variations of the theme display the author's awareness of the endless metamorphosis man undergoes and the elemental position suffering occupies in man's life. In The Assistant and The Fixer, suffering directly brings about the plot crisis, while in The Natural and A New Life, it effectively contributes to the development of the plot. Suffering, then, is an integral part of the thematic core in each novel.

It has been said that "the beautiful part of writing is knowing what you have to write."[2] Malamud knows what he has to write. His judgment is reflected in his novels which explore the moral life of

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[1] Atlanta Constitution, March 6, 1967, p. 18.

[2] Paul Darcy Boles, "The Vision Then and Now," The Living Novel: A Symposium, p. 33.

suffering man caught in the onrush of new experience and new problems and enmeshed in the knowledge of past experience and past problems.

What it is to suffer Jews historically know, Malamud intuitively knows, and his readers vicariously come to know. The theme of suffering in Malamud's novels is thus inextricably bound in the author's personal "Jewishness," in his recognition of the broader values of human morality implicit in the personal and historical experience of Jewish people. It is out of this basic perception that he has shaped his own idea of Jewishness, which is not rooted in the religion of ancestral Judaism but rather in his particular image of suffering mankind. According to Leslie Fiedler, it is easiest to say what the content of Malamud's Jewishness is not. "It is not an imaginary revived orthodoxy, not a literary man's neo-Hasidism out of Martin Buber by T. S. Eliot, not the rational 'normative Judaism' of the Reformed."[1] It is not the convenent but apparently compassion on which Malamud relies in capturing the strangeness of Jewish experience.[2] In fact, on the positive side, Norman Podhoretz has succinctly stated, "To Malamud . . . any man who suffers greatly and who longs also to be better than he is can be called a Jew."[3] Podhoretz contends, therein, that Malamud conceives the Jews as all of humanity seen under the twin aspects of suffering and aspiration. Malamud's own assertion is that all men are

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[1]Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p. 109.

[2]Alfred Kazin, Contemporaries (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1962), p. 206.

[3]Podhoretz, op. cit., p. 177.

Jews because all men are victims of a world they never made.[1] His work, accordingly, celebrates not a people but the individual who is both less than he could be and more than he seems but who endures his encounters with life; and, in Malamud's work, anybody in humanity who endures is a Jew.[2] Thus, his "Jewishness" is not ethnocentric, but significantly, it is universally applicable.

Nevertheless, to a certain degree the suffering endured by the Jews in the past has provided Malamud with the basis for his conception, which is aptly utilized in his persistent theme. "The Jewish expertise," Marcus Klein says, "is in suffering."[3] He further adds that if suffering is viewed as the communion of people under heaven, then the separate Jewish experience can be seen as a paradigm of that communion. The relationship of the suffering theme to experience is basic. Thematically, suffering is ladened with the experience not of one man or one ethnic group or one religious group but of all mankind. Humankind's relationship to suffering is in large measure conditioned and determined by the nature of man's own individualism and experience; however, all men, individually or collectively, relate in some way to suffering. Thus, in Malamud's novels, suffering is seen as:

> ...the one possible mode of engagement both with and in this world. All circumstances are in the first place

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[1] Guttmann, op. cit., p. 568.

[2] Joseph Featherstone, "Bernard Malamud," Atlantic Monthly, CCIXX (March, 1967), 96.

[3] Marcus Klein, After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1965), p. 267.

> tragic because circumstance is itself the name for the loss of what is higher. Therefore to be engaged with this world -- to love this world, or to love in this world -- is to suffer. . . . All and any experiences make men suffer, and suffering is their achievement.[1]

The common life of men is accepted and acknowledged through suffering. Experience causes suffering, but suffering is achievement. Since this life is a constant struggle to overcome evil and to regain the perfect state, in Malamud's world man must suffer on earth to achieve happiness and contentment, worldly not other-worldly happiness and contentment. Though Malamud's insight into the distress and malady of modern human existence is expressed in terms symbolic of an individual's experience, it is also expensive enough to apprehend suffering as a universal problem persisting among all of the human race.

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[1] Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE THEME OF SUFFERING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MALAMUD'S CONCEPTION OF MODERN MAN

The theme of Suffering which is so prominent in Bernard Malamud's fictional world is attuned to his particular conception of modern man in the real world. Malamud recognizes the anguish of the contemporary man, who in an alienated state suffers pangs of loneliness while seeking his true identity. Man is beset by a craving desire for success and acceptance which often culminates in wretched failure. Moreover, man is caught in the struggle to assert his identity; and, despite his effort, frequently he is drowned by the great moving flow of society and suffers a loss of the very identity he attempts to find. Though invariably a part of humanity, man, repeatedly, is discovered to be an alienated, lone figure outside the pale. This desolate plight of modern man stimulates Malamud's cognizance of suffering as a very real and intricate part of man's existence. The grasp for that which may never be reached and the search for the self which may never be found accentuate the feeling of loss and undergird the theme of suffering in the world simulated in Malamud's four novels, The Natural, The Assistant, A New Life, and The Fixer.

While, as suggested in the previous chapter, Malamud's Jewish heritage provides him with an adequate background for his usage of the suffering theme, his philosophy of man gives him a formula for the development of that theme. Malamud's vision of man in contemporary life is one which partakes of the discontinuities and confusions of

modern living; however, his vision also reveals a moral consciousness of man's ability to be better than he is and to make the world better than it is. This total vision permeates Malamud's fiction.

The concept of man incorporated into Malamud's novels is influenced by trends and views currently popular in social, economic, political, and literary thought. Pervading the thinking of our period is the awareness of man's alienation or, as the existential philosophers believe, the idea that we are and remain strangers in this world.[1]

Conditions existing in society today have created the forces which cause alienation and isolation. Among these menacing conditions are the threat of cold war, the tension of racial prejudice, the weight of financial power, the pressure of mass media, and the competitiveness of social organization. All of these further the individual's feelings of inadequacy and helplessness and accelerate his inclinations toward dissociation and withdrawal. All too many men are forced to cope with too many demanding institutions in a world that is already problematical. As one critical observer has said:

> American society is remarkable for the degree of loneliness (not solitude) in which the individual can find himself. In our mass age, the individual's lack of privacy, his unlimited demand for self-satisfaction, his primary concern for his own health and well being, have actually thrown him back on himself more than before.[2]

Thus, in our highly complex and organized society, it is evident that

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[1] Fritz Pappenheim, The Alienation of Modern Man (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), p. 105.

[2] Kazin, Contemporaries, p. 208.

social processes themselves tend toward dissociation.[1]

In the world today, man is faced with separation from his fellow man, from life around him, and from himself. Current trends are increasingly toward mechanization and automation, which, though invaluable in forwarding progress and assuring comfort, have succeeded in depersonalizing our world. Personal contact, taken for granted in the years before the Industrial Revolution, has become less and less frequent within the industrialized twentieth century society. Consequently, man too often is unable to achieve a personal identity or a group relatedness. Furthermore, the direction of life presently is moving away from small farms and out of rural areas, causing man to become alienated even from nature herself. Due to advanced atomic and scientific research, man has become estranged from his gods. "The present age is in many respects one of transition," Margaret Mary Wood rightly concludes.[2] In a study of our present situation, she goes on to state:

> It is an age in which old ties have been discarded before the new ones were ready to be assumed. The strong authoritarian family and religious relationships which integrated the simple society of the medieval Age of Faith lapsed before a new integration at a higher level of rationality and personal expression had been achieved. In the interim situation various of the processes that characterize an increasingly complex society, such as individualization, differentiation, specialization, segregation, stratification, competition, and urbanization, have tended to become unduly isolating. . . . In modern society their operation holds both a promise and a threat: a promise of greater opportunities for self realization ...

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[1] Margaret Mary Wood, Paths of Loneliness: The Individual Isolated in Modern Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 10.

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

> and a threat of isolation. . . . How the scales are tipped for the individual depends upon the manner in which these processes are interrelated with other factors in his total situation. That the scales are so often tipped towards isolation is one of the major social problems of our time.[1]

The processes of which Miss Wood writes are normal in themselves, and yet they manage to get out of balanced proportion when their divisive effects go uncontrolled by counter processes. Resultantly, individuals lose touch with the common life of men and live marginal existences. In addition to this disturbing sense of estrangement from the world, full knowledge of self is unattainable and spiritual values are undermined. Consequently, the alienated man becomes Everyman and, at the same time, no man. He is merely an entity, adrift in a world which has little meaning for him and over which he exercises no power, and he is a stranger to himself and to others.[2]

In Malamud's novels from the first, The Natural, to the latest, The Fixer, characterization portrays the author's conception of man and dramatizes his idea of man's plight. His lonely protagonists confront the cosmos knowing that the veneer of civilization can offer no protection.[3] They suffer much for their efforts. His heroes, Roy Hobbes of The Natural, Frank Alpine of The Assistant, Seymour Levin of A New Life, and Yakov Bok of The Fixer, struggle to sustain themselves

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[1] Ibid., p. 9f.

[2] Eric Josephson and Mary Josephson, "Introduction," Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society, ed. Eric Josephson and Mary Josephson (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1964), p. 11.

[3] Paul West, The Modern Novel, Vol. II: The United States and Other Countries (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1963), p. 305.

against the odds of social pressures which threaten to engulf their individualities into a faceless, nameless fluid society. Through his characters, Malamud successfully describes man's fate of alienation and helplessness and records the painful experience of "the uprooted man, the nostalgic exile and wanderer,"[1] and the perennial searcher. Characterization depicts isolation between groups (seen especially in The Assistant and The Fixer) and isolation between the individual and others of his group (treated extensively in The Natural and A New Life). All of his heroes, whether imprisoned in concrete tenements or in their own divided psyches, long for physical and spiritual fulfillment and self-realization.[2] For the most part, Malamud's people are cut off either from themselves or from the world about them.

In Malamud's world, characters are reminded of what is best in them by their alienation from modern history, their unsatisfied needs and shattered hopes.[3] The tangible signs of their alienation are disconsolate rooms, barred doors, and dismal groceries.[4] Concerning Malamud's fictional depiction of man's struggle to survive as a total, integrated man, Sidney Richman has observed that

> His essential hero is the unintegrated mask-wearer seeking for a connection with the world. But in failing to attain connection with his own nature, he finds that

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[1] Pappenheim, op. cit., p. 34.

[2] Richman, Bernard Malamud, p. 42.

[3] Ibid., p. 25.

[4] Ibid.

> the world to which he fits his face turns into a chaos of unfulfillment.[1]

Malamud's "essential hero" is found in each of his novels. There is Roy Hobbes, baseball star of The Natural, who is made and broken by his encounters with the public world and the jeering, cheering fans. For the Roy obsessed by a consuming desire for fame, isolation of the inner self prevents a true, meaningful relationship with society. Then, there is Frank Alpine, The Assistant, an old-young man completely alone in life, who, longing desperately to "belong," haltingly attempts to find a place for himself outside his familiar gentile culture. For Frankie, the divisive effects of a hidden crime and the alienating forces of a conflicting psyche prevent close, entire association with the rest of humanity. And there is A New Life's Seymour Levin, reformed drunkard and enterprising teacher, who leaves the crowded, confining East in search of a "new life" and a positive identity in the open, spacious West. For Levin, the promise of meaningful identity and existence reverses into the reality of a social isolation spurred by the ultra-conservative, biased and limited inhabitants of a college community. Finally, there is Yakov Bok, The Fixer, a shtetl Jew who seeks fulfillment outside the isolated confines of his village, but who only discovers rejection and hatred in the heart of an alien society. For Yakov, the alienating forces are the Russian political and economical society, which both hampers and forwards his search for his true self and his real connection with the world.

Each one of these four men desire involvement with humanity.

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

Each dreams of individual fulfillment. Each feels the pain of estrangement. Each knows the loneliness of isolation. Inevitably, each suffers. Accordingly, these four characters concretize and dramatize Malamud's conception of present day man.

In the work of Malamud, just as in that of James Jones, James Baldwin, Philip Roth, and Wright Morris, the individual while laboring to maintain himself, or an idea of himself, comes under the "pressure of a vast, public life which may dwarf him as an individual while permitting him to be a giant in hatred or fantasy."[1] This point is particularly evident in the characterization of Roy Hobbes, "the natural" of Malamud's first novel.

Roy is a natural athlete who instinctively plays baseball without the aid of training and coaching. He is a country orphan whose aspiration is to break records and make history in the major leagues. In fact, his one driving raison d'etre is to be the best there ever was in baseball. His insatiable hunger for achievement causes him to go unaware of the significance of his being as well as that of other men. His overwhelming desires separate him from the rest of society.

Although his entrance into professional baseball is delayed fifteen years, Roy does manage to become a hero, but he is a lone, haunted hero who, even in his mature years, does not recognize the nature of his own existence. He wins the cheers of the crowd, but he remains a lonely man living out a deliberate fantasy. His predicament suggests the idea that alienation from self is the grounds for isolation from

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[1] Saul Bellow, "Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," Encounter, XXI (No. 5, November, 1963), 23.

other men.[1]

Significantly, Roy's isolation from others is emphasized by his relationship with the Knights, the team of which he is a member. Roy stands apart from his teammates. Joint effort and cooperation -- that is to say, team work -- are unknown to him. He, mistakenly, believes that he must win each gam single-handedly.

The only personal contacts he seeks in life are with women, through whom he hopes to satisfy the needs he is able to feel, yet unable to identify. Neither Harriet Bird, who fires a bullet into his gut, nor Memo Paris, who entices him into a sellout, can offer him the physical fulfillment he desires or the spiritual fulfillment he needs. They only emphasize his isolation because they, like Roy himself, are alienated victims of a "confused, anguished consciousness"[2] of only themselves.

At every turn, Roy is dwarfed as an individual. The fans filling the stands of the ballpark have no knowledge of "the natural" as Roy Hobbes. To them he is just the nameless hero of the hour. They even confuse him with a dead hero who had played in Roy's position. It is just as easy for the crowd to shower Roy with valuable gifts and affection as it is for them to stone him with rotten vegetables and abuses. Seemingly, the uncaring game viewers serve to point out that society needs almost as desperately to hate and destroy the hero as to love

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[1]Richman, op. cit., p. 55.

[2]Roger Angell, "Introduction," The Natural ("Time Reading Program Special Edition;" New York: Time Incorporated, 1966), p. xv.

and live by him.[1]

Roy's encounters in the vast, public world only cause him to become more and more totally concerned with his false idea of himself. He even succumbs to gluttonous over-eating in a drastic attempt to satisfy his personal needs. Roy's dilemma is characterized by one critic as follows:

> Like many of Malamud's heroes, Roy is the image of the unintegrated men, the hero who acts incorrectly despite his awareness. From this lack of integration, his pain proceeds. Trapped between the way of spirit and flesh, natural man and hero, there is only wave after wave of agony. So Roy yearns... for integration at any cost.[2]

His tormented pursuit of recognition and satisfaction leads him finally to accept a bribe and, consequently, to destroy his idea of himself as hero. Only then does Roy struggle in a belated effort to save himself. With the wisdom of insight, he discovers that he has sacrificed himself for false, tangible goods. Almost too late, he tries to salvage the remnants of his pitiful existence. He recognizes that he must leave behind his preoccupation with himself and his ambition. He must start life over again but with the wealth of his experience and suffering. He resolves to involve himself with humanity. It is only then, at the very end of his story, that "the natural" searches beneath the surface for the true meaning of his being.

The poignant story of the prematurely old Frankie Alpine presents the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into man's nature and fate according to the beliefs of author Malamud. Frank's account appears

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[1] Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p. 104.

[2] Richman, op. cit., p. 35.

in The Assistant, a book which seems to be a "belated novel of the Thirties, a last expression of apocalyptic fears and Messianic hopes of those terrible but relatively simple times."[1]

A purposeless, aimless drifter, Frank aspires to escape inner dissatisfaction. His melancholy eyes signal a lonely existence. His long, black overcoat, which looked lived in, exemplifies his isolated, homeless life. Since he never knew his mother and lost his father early, he is, in all respects, a rootless character journeying through life in search of an identity. His life, as a result, has been spent on the move and, at times, on the run. He is, as Saul Bellow describes, the individual in American fiction who comes through to us as a lone colonist sent to a remote place ("some Alaska of the soul") in which he discovers that what he has to bring under cultivation is a barren emptiness within himself.[2]

The "remote place" which Frankie stumbles upon is a tiny Jewish store in the center of a gentile community. There, he commits a robbery, which ultimately haunts his conscience. His act results in feelings of guilt and in the realization that his futile existence involves merely an endless series of wrong-doings. He himself surmises:

> His goddamned life has pushed him wherever it went; he has led it nowhere. He was blown around in any breath that blew, owned nothing, not even experience to show for the years he had lived. If you had experience you knew at least when to start and where to quite; all he knew was how to mangle himself more. The self he had secretly considered valuable was, for all he could make of it, a dead rat.

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[1] Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p. 92.

[2] Bellow, op. cit., p. 25.

He stank.[1]

Motivated by guilt, Frank resolves to help his poverty-ridden victim in his struggle for economic survival. Thus, ironically, Frank, a suffering and isolated Christian, moves into the Jewish world of the equally as isolated Bober family. He desires to become a man of character, a useful human being. He wishes to be honest and trustworthy. What he actually wants is definition with moral being.[2] By assuming the role of crime-expiating assistant to Morris Bober, Frank seeks to rid himself of spiritual deprivation.

However, once inside the gesheft, "the assistant" discovers a materially bleak and impoverished world. He witnesses the inevitable frustration and loneliness of Jewish life with its exemplary alienation from ordinary life.[3] He gains a sensitive awareness of the daily aches and indignities of other men.[4] Through secretive vigilance, he becomes aware of the detachment of the alienated family which, for all practical purposes, is entombed in the store.

Nevertheless, Frankie falters in his efforts to aid the Bobers. His resolution to do good, unconditioned by previous experience, weakens; his tendency to think only of himself returns. He pilfers

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[1]Bernard Malamud, The Assistant (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), p. 175.

[2]Klein, After Alienation, p. 269.

[3]Ibid., p. 267.

[4]Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 162.

from the cash register which he knows to contain so little. He lies to the grocer whom he has come to respect. He even rapes the daughter, Helen, whom he loves. In short, he becomes once again the old Frank Alpine because he cannot sustain himself against the urges of a false, yet familiar, self. One critic calls Frank a "grat back-slider" since he fails to realize that the self denial which is the price of moral being really hurts and that for such self-denial there is no relief.[1]

Frank exemplifies a divided psyche vacillating from good to evil. He typifies a fractured personality continually dominated by the yearning to fulfill itself.[2] He is awakened to the quest for significant moral identity, but he is unable to persist in that quest. Implicit in his actions is the idea that:

> Man is doomed to struggle hopefully between a desire for spiritual growth and the destructive urgency of his own weaknesses, and his tragedy lies in his moral awareness of his own condition.[3]

Eventually, the life of the self is not completely lost to Frank. Through his acquaintance with Morris's Jewish experience and endurance, he is raised to a meaningful existence. The untimely death of the grocer causes Frankie to realize an extreme, quixotic sense of obligation which helps him to find his identity. He assumes the burden of the store and proves to himself that life is not necessarily void of

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[1] Klein, op. cit., p. 271.

[2] Richman, op. cit., p. 56.

[3] H. E. Francis, "Bernard Malamud's Everyman," Midstream, VII (Winter, 1961), 93.

values. He takes on the duty of keeping the grocer's wife fed, clothed, and sheltered, and, in addition, the responsibility of helping the grocer's daughter achieve her dream, a college education. His assistantship under the Jew, Morris Bober, attains the status of a defining experience. Hence, Frank learns, from his "apprenticeship to the discipline of Jewish suffering,"[1] how to live with himself and the world. His search for identity ends with his acceptance of Judaism, his circumcision and his conversion.

Seymour Levin, the hero of A New Life, bears certain resemblance to other of Malamud's searchers after identity even though he is much less burdened with the past.[2] The son of a petty thief and a mad woman, Levin endeavors, at the age of thirty, to make a clean break and to begin life anew. A lonely ex-drunk and New York Jew, he secures a teaching position at a small Pacific Northwestern college, Cascadia, in the town of Easchester. Although locked in himself, he is desperate to get out.[3] Hoping to lift himself above the sordid circumstances of his past, Levin sojourns to Cascadia wearing a beard not only to symbolize his new identity but also to hide his face from himself. In a review of the novel, Richard Elman labels Levin a "kind of latter day shlmiel with Thoreau on the brain, who sets out to find a new identity

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1 Klein, op. cit., p. 267.

2 Richard M. Elman, "Malamud on Campus," Commonweal, LXXV (October 27, 1961), 115.

3 Klein, op. cit., p. 290.

for himself among the idealized simplifications of campus life at Cascadia."[1]

The journey westward is Levin's chance to satisfy an intense hunger for that which he had never known, a fulfilling life. At journey's end, he immediately feels uncomfortable. His dress, the carefully matched conservative garb -- complete with hat and umbrella -- of New York City life, are in striking contrast to the bright colors and casual attire of Easchester's residents. Even his thick beard is an oddity among the clean-shaven Westerners. His formal manners and clipped speech also mark him as an alien Easterner in the eyes of the informal, easy-going townsfolk. In spite of all differences, Levin -- passionate idealist that he is -- resolves to so all that he can to become an integrated man.

Nonetheless, his experiences prove to be a series of disappointments, reversals and disasters. For all its natural beauties and surroundings, Cascadia is a type of spiritual and moral vacuum. To begin with, Levin is informed that Cascadia is not a liberal arts school and that his classes are not literature but composition courses. This is a tremendous let down because it is his personal belief that the liberal arts feed out hearts.[2] Then, too, he finds that the land-grant college, as well as the town, is no longer creative. Despite its location in the freedom of Western civilization, Cascadia has lapsed into a viciously narrow community, whose major concern is maintaining the status

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[1] Elman, loc. cit.

[2] Bernard Malamud, A New Life (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961), p. 125.

quo. The provincial little community is both dull and stale. The Department of English, where Levin goes to work, is particularly out of touch with academic ideals as it is ruled over by Chairman Orville Fairchild who has an unswayable dedication to the drill and memory of his thirty-year-old book, Elements of Grammar. The faculty members are corrupted by internal pettiness, triviality, and ambition. They are all "emotionally crippled or out of touch with self."[1] None of them offers Levin the companionship that he seeks because each sees him as an outsider, a potential disturber or radical. He goes from one to the other looking for a friend, someone to share his ideals and ideas about life. At each door he is rebuffed. Unable to find a real companion, he admits that "he wanted a friend and got friendship; he wanted steak and got spam."[2]

Although his need is for a friend or two, he wearily turns his search toward a lover. However, even his tries at romantic fulfillment end in frustration. In order to ease his feelings of utter loneliness, he attempts a sexual encounter with a waitress, which hilariously and abruptly terminates unconsummated. Desperately he reaches out for Avis Fliss, the only single female on the English faculty, but he can not find complete physical satisfaction with her because of damaged, sentitive breasts. When he does succeed in a rendezvous with one of his older students, the affair ends immediately due to his realization that a mere release of sexual tensions is unsatisfactory

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[1] Richman, op. cit., p. 80.

[2] Malamud, A New Life, p. 125.

for his basic need for companionship and relevance in life.

Added to these unfortunate experiences are other disappointments and despondencies. His teaching job is not the challenge of his dreams. His students are not dedicated and hard working buther rather plagiarizing and disinterested. At this point, his isolation is complete.

After each encounter with life, he retires to his room in despair. His only comfort lies in the solitude of his room. There he finds contentment in a kind of retreat from society which is unaware of him and unconcerned about his plight. His motivating desire to find a place for himself and his ideals go unrealized. All of his efforts directed toward job, success, and freedom in the larger world are attended by dark, comic despair.[1] Each trial to find satisfaction outside his room and in the world ends futilely. Neither nature, teaching, politics nor affairs offers completeness. His anticipations are blighted; his yearnings are unculminated. His ceaseless search for direction and connection consists of "lengthy and private speculations leading to a series of bumbling and abortive attempts at engagement followed by long retreats."[2] Whatever Cascadia or the world holds of a better life is always just beyond Levin's reach. Thus, he is not only isolated -- that is, having few contacts with family or community -- but he is also lonely -- or suffering feelings of lack or loss of companionship.

However, S. Levin responds to his situation by constantly

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[1] Richman, op. cit., p. 81.

[2] Klein, op. cit., p. 286.

questioning his inner feelings and persistently pursuing deeper satisfactions. He does not abandon his struggle to lead a new life or to have meaningful relationships. His vicissitudes leave him with wisdom and courage.

His full participation in life comes about rather ironically; his achievement is by no means idealistic. He falls in love with a faculty wife with whom he has an affair that is at once satisfying and repulsive. Seemingly inspired by communion with another individual, Levin becomes engaged in championing "liberal" causes -- fighting for better textbooks and campaigning for the department chairmanship. In the end, he is forced into an absolute moral position, a strange and private achievement in which he realizes that his struggle is not against society but for involvement with society. Subsequently, he openly declares his love for Pauline Gilley and assumes the responsibility for her and her adopted children not because he must but because he can. He plunges uncertainly after a moral imperative for the lack of anything else.[1] His love for another man's wife hardens into a type of dedication to duty and obligation. He discovers that

> Morality -- awareness of it -- perhaps in his reaction to his father's life, or in sympathy with his mother's, or in another way, had lit an early candle in Levin's. He saw in good beauty. Good was as if man's spirit had produced art in life. Levin felt that the main source of conscious morality was love of life, anybody's life. Morality was a way of giving value to other lives through assuring human rights. As you valued men's lives yours received value. You earned what you sold, got what you gave. That, if not entirely true, ought to be. Our days are short, thought Levin, our bodies frail. The universe is unknown, remorseless. We have no certain understanding of Nature's

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[1] Ibid., p. 287.

> intention, nor God's if he intends. We know the meagerness, ignorance, cruelty of too many men and too many societies. We must protect the human, the good, the innocent. Those who had discovered their own moral courage, or created it, must join other who are moral. . .. Any act of good is a diminution of evil in the world. ... To be good, then good was no moral way of life, but to be good after being evil was a possibility of life, . .. It was not easy but it was a free choice you might make, and the beauty of it was in the making, in the rightness of it. You knew it was right from the form it gave your life, the moving esthetic the act created in you.[1]

Levin's decision to join others who are moral in an effort to maintain his own newly-found moral courage is in keeping with an idea expressed by Margaret Mary Wood who says that

> Faith in oneself, based on experience gained in productive intellectual and emotional activity, is a prequesite for faith in others. Confidence in one's own power of thought, observation, and judgment is essential for a free, spontaneous expression of loyalty to a common purpose. From such confidence man gains a sense of inner security which gives him the courage to open wide the 'windows of the ego' and to take a positive, constructive attitude toward the problem of man's need for unity.[2]

And unity here refers to unity of self and unity of self with the rest of humanity. Levin's idealism accomplishes a real inner integrity and confidence in himself. Through responsibility he is able to find himself as a man. Accordingly, he acknowledges and accepts connection with the common life of man. Significantly, his odyssey, though climaxed, does not end. He must set out again. Nevertheless, he has achieved a new identity. Now, the "new life" of the title can be known

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[1] Malamud, A New Life, p. 258.

[2] Wood, op. cit., p. 199.

to dawn only in the heart of Seymour Levin.[1]

One of the most moving pictures of the isolated, lonely man in American fiction is found in The Fixer. Yakov Shepovitch Bok, title character of Malamud's fourth novel, is one of the most fully rendered characters in modern literature.[2] The story of this Russian Jew takes place far beyond the shores of America, but perhaps better than any of the others, it relates Malamud's views about modern man. Significantly, one reviewer believes:

> At its best The Fixer is a portrait of a man alone, stripped of the last shred, unsupported by the comfort of false hopes, left to beat his head against the wall. In Bok, you recognize the archetypical Malamud hero, the ironic victim who grows in compassion as he suffers. He is a memorable figure with the painful powers of concentration of the self-educated; his creator understands him with pity, impatience, and growing admiration. He is sharply drawn.[3]

Yakov Bok, handyman-fixer, is that lone man. Orphaned at an early age and deserted by a childless wife, he has not a single tie to any of the other Jews living in his shtetl, a small island surrounded by Russia. He feels that he is not only a stranger to the villagers, but that he is also a stranger to their Jewish traditions. Tired of poverty, despair, and estrangement synonymous with his village life, Yakov withdraws from the Jewish Pale of Settlement. He

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[1] John Hollander, "To Find the Westward Path," Partisan Review, XXIX (Winter, 1962), 138.

[2] Granville Hicks, "Literary Horizons," Saturday Review, XLIX (September 10, 1966), 38.

[3] Featherstone, "Bernard Malamud," p. 97.

starts out for a new life and a better future in the larger world of the Russian city, Kiev. He leaves behind the Law and tradition, but he takes with him his tools and Spinoza.

Once inside the "holy city," the fixer finds that his horizons are not broader. There are even fewer jobs and less food -- though he had believed it impossible to be so. He is an alien and still a stranger. More than that, he is even more alone with less chance of gaining anything in life. In the city he is equally as unable to establish intimate personal relationships of affection, understanding and response. He still lacks a feeling of relatedness to the society and the age in which he lives. He remains the victim of the unendurable sense of aloneness from which he had endeavored to escape. At this point, Yakov Bok's suffering is doubly keen because he is twice alienated -- from his own people and from the rest of society. He lacks emotional security since he is out of touch with the Jews of his village and since he is unable to find fulfillment among the gentiles of the city.

However, just as he admits that he is without any hope whatever, Yakov is betrayed into hoping again. After rescuing a rich Russian anti-Semite, he receives a job in brick factory as a reward for his good-Samaritan-deed. The job is not without demands for he must renounce his true Jewish identity and assume a Russian name, "Yakov Ivanovitch Dologushev," In this new identity Yakov is extremely vulnerable because he is an outsider, a Jew secretly living and working among gentiles who vehemently hate him and all of his faith. His is a precarious position even though he only wants to live out a passive existence. He desires neither involvement nor engagement with the

world. He realizes that social alienation is unescapably his so he attempts to live uncommitted to anything -- especially politics which, according to his understanding of Spinoza, is a threat to his freedom.

Nevertheless, his secret soon revealed, Yakov is falsely arrested for the ritual murder of a twelve-year-old Christian boy. The remainder -- and the most detailed part -- of his story takes place inside the confines of a Russian prison. Or it may be that then, as Joseph Featherstone concludes, "The whole focus is on the private drama in the mind of Yakov Bok."[1] The wait for trial extends over two years of torture, indignities, humiliations -- in total, agonized suffering -- and marks the rise of Yakov's moral character and definition. Truly, his moral stature increases proportionately to the multiplication of his physical miseries. In fact, even Job's afflictions were nothing compared to his and he has no solace, for he is not even a believer.[2]

The name "Yakov Bok" curiously suggests "scapegoat."[3] A scapegoat is exactly what the fixer becomes during his long imprisonment. He is being used in a racial-political plot against all Russian Jews. However, he refuses to implicate the Jewish people in the blood-matzos accusation. Although he has rejected both his faith and community, Yakov does not admit to the charge that ritual murder is an essential part of the Jewish religion. Though such a confession might alleviate

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Katherine Gauss Jackson, "Books in Brief," Harper's Magazine, CCXXXIII (October, 1966), 127f.

[3] "The Outsider," Time, September 9, 1966, p. 106.

his personal suffering, Yakov understands that it would cause Jewish persecutions to be justified. Thus, he rejects his one hope for leniency. Neither does he give himself over in desperation to the relief of suicide, which he realizes would also imply guilt and defame the Jews. Consequently, he withstands all calculated efforts to dehumanize, degrade, and weaken him. He clings to hope because he believes in men.[1] In the process, he endures solitary confinement and total isolation from everything human, but he survives with a passionate human integrity. His drama ends as he stands on his way to trial a full human being, whose experiences have made him completely conscious of the significance of existence.

Thus, as his four heroes evidence, Bernard Malamud perceives the modern human being as both isolated and alienated. These two conditions estrange man from his inner self. Resultantly, man suffers. Malamud's philosophy, however, incorporates a distinct vision of man as capable of being better than he is. Life may be difficult and complex, but it is not devoid of hope. The factors alienate, isolate and cause the loss or confusion of identity in Malamud's sthics, neither deprive man of the hope of attaining meaningful relations with others nor rob him of the possibility of achieving true knowledge of himself. In his latest novel, Malamud has the title character, the fixer, remark, "If I have any philosophy . . . it's that life could be better than it is."[2]

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[1] Webster Schott, Review of The Fixer, by Bernard Malamud, Life, LXI (September 16, 1966), 14.

[2] Bernard Malamud, The Fixer (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1966), p. 79.

Therefore his overall view is not totally pessimistic or overbearingly depressing. In Malamud's world, the possibility of full participation without the loss of individuality always exists. Malamud's set of ethical beliefs establishes suffering as the saving grace of mankind.

Significantly, it is the very suffering engenered by man's varying types of estrangement which offers a means of succeeding in reaching a fuller public and inner life. Experience remains the great teacher of men, but it is the experience of suffering specifically which brings Malamud's characters to the full realization of what living is all about. Further, suffering teaches his people what it means to be human. Suffering involves each man with the rest of humanity. Suffering, too, identifies every man as human as it encourages each man to move outside himself and into the world around him. According to the philosophy expounded by Malamud, suffering inspires man to gain self knowledge and a feeling of identity which ward off alienating and isolating forces. Suffering, then, leads the individual to a sense of belonging and involvement with society and the world.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTITUDE OF BERNARD MALAMUD TOWARD SUFFERING

While the preceding chapter exposes Malamud's conception of man and its link with suffering, this chapter explores his attitude toward suffering.

The basis for Malamud's attitude toward suffering lies somewhere between his understanding of the Jewish experience and his recognition of an elemental idea in his own mind. A product of these two conceptions is his acknowledgment of suffering as the hope of all men who need to be awakened to a better existence or re-born to a new life.

Close reading of the four novels reveals that the author maintains a consistent attitude towards suffering. Malamud has certain beliefs that shape and form his attitude toward suffering. First, he believes that suffering is inevitable for all men and hence universal. Secondly, he believes that for most men suffering is a psychological and spiritual necessity. Through suffering men are fulfilled, and through suffering men achieve a unique self-awareness -- a meaningful kind of identity. Therefore, Malamud believes that men should not try to escape suffering but accept it as part of the human condition. Finally, he believes that through suffering men are redeemed, reclaimed, and renewed. Only the man who has truly suffered can gain a wholly new insight or be "born again." These beliefs merge to produce both Malamud's complete attitude toward suffering and his total self-conscious effort to create a fiction with a uniform attitude toward suffering is apparent in all

four novels.

Inevitability, one of the most readily observed concepts in Malamud's total attitude, reflects the beliefs that, since living is itself a struggle for some higher good, suffering in life is unadvoidable. Inasmuch as Malamud considers the world predominantly evil, it follows that he regards suffering as inevitable in the world. Both involvement (Frank Alpine, The Assistant) and estrangement (Yakov Bok, The Fixer) result in suffering. The discontent and confusion resulting from daily mundane cares produce suffering whether a foreign Russian (The Fixer), a Western academic (A New Life), or an urban commercial (The Assistant) society is involved. Marcus Klein in his After Alienation explains the inevitability of suffering:

> The human task is to make and preserve a home in this world: to suffer in it, to contain every schmerz, thereby to love, thereby, for lack of any better present possibility, to make the moral conjunction that will accomodate human beings to it. But it is a murky, swampy world that Malamud in the first place knows -- thick, oppressive, ominous, but also amorphous, liquescent, every seeming solidarity treacherously uncertain. And the fiction has been most taut when it has been able to propose in an uninterrupted vision the cost of living, of holding on, the comically desperate obligations of being, carried out in a world that exists just this side of nothing.[1]

Malamud's vision of life as a day to day struggle for survival and salvation confirms the inevitability of suffering incurred by the "cost of living" in a "murky, swampy world." The Bobers, Alpines, and Boks of the world daily work frantically at keeping enough food in their bodies for another day of work. The Levins and Hobbeses fight to fulfill "their comically desperate obligations of being" to get one

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[1] Klein, After Alienation, p. 276.

inch closer to the truth of their pitiful existences. Poor lonely Jews on the edge of urban disintegration hunger for a share in the feast of common experience in a world of treacherous uncertainty.[1] The very process through which these human beings try to hold on in life results in suffering, inevitable suffering. As Yakov Bok pitifully sums it up, "You wait. You wait in minutes of hope and days of helplessness."[2] Indeed in Malamud's world, there is no certainty in life except the fact of suffering.[3]

Similarly, necessity and acceptance are two closely related ideas in Malamud's total attitude toward suffering. One, necessity, implies that suffering is the only way to bring about true communion of the individual with himself and society. It includes the idea that suffering is the only means to achievement in the world. The second idea of acceptance reflects Malamud's belief that individual must humbly succumb to obligation and responsibility and must heroically endure the burdens and vicissitudes of life in order to live fully. It has been supposed that Malamud's total and oft repeated moral message is the necessity of accepting moral obligation in this world.[4] Ihab Hassan prefers to conclude that Malamud transforms pain into responsibility.[5] Both

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[1]Featherstone, "Bernard Malamud," p. 95.

[2]Malamud, The Fixer, p. 213.

[3]Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 167.

[4]Klein, op. cit., p. 252.

[5]Richman, Bernard Malamud, p. 41.

necessity and acceptance are integral parts of Malamud's entire attitude towards suffering.

Suffering is a reality and a good in that it requires responsibility in life and benevolence towards men. Accordingly, success for Malamud's heroes comes through failure in actual society. Success only occurs when it is incomplete and sealed in irony and continuing, hallowing pain.[1] Roy Hobbes's name is erased from the annals of baseball. Frank Alpine never realizes a profit from his blood-sucking store. S. Levin forfeits his promising teaching career. Yakov Bok rides to his trial without ever reaching material success. However, they all go through the necessary humiliation which results in the paradoxical joy of winning through losing. They come to acknowledge the truth that loss is continuous and universal.[2] With that acknowledgment they discover both the world and communion with it. Success for them does not lie in material accomplishments. As Sidney Richman writes:

> The Morris Bobers and the Seymour Levins in Malamud's functional world succeed as men only by virtue of their failures in society. Were it not that their suffering deflects them from their own achievements, they might well intone: what profits it a man if he gains the world and loses himself?[3]

The only way for these characters to achieve is through suffering. Suffering deflects them from selfish ambition and prideful gain. What they achieve is entirely moral and spiritual.

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[1] Klein, op. cit., p. 264.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Richman, op. cit., p. 23.

Richman further observes

> A predominant belief . . . in the prose of Malamud is that when man strives to accommodate himself to the world . . . the measure of his success is often times indistinguishable from his failure; that frequently what is attained is only . . . a surburban make-believe where glutted freezers give surrogate consolation to hungers that are insatiable and where the vaunted 'good life' is more often than not a system of blinders to screen men from hollowness within and the catastrophic possibilities without.[1]

The fact of the matter is that Malamud believes that the valuable state for which men should strive is the union of self and society; this union necessitates suffering but not the sacrifice of self. Malamud's sufferers fundamentally express despair rather than any spiritual refusal of this world.[2]

The author seems to be fascinated with the choices that men make or refuse.[3] He relates that by facing up to these choices men learn to understand and accept themselves as human beings.[4] The road of suffering is usually the road to moral contentment. When his characters voluntarily choose that road they are on the way to moral awareness, and success of sorts. Malamud's people either admit to suffering or by reason of some preoccupation, they do not; however, in all cases suffering is the one expression of true goodness, and it is

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[1] Ibid., p. 21f.

[2] Featherstone, op. cit., p. 204.

[3] "Editors' Preface to The Natural," by Bernard Malamud ("Time Reading Program Special Edition;" New York: Time Incorporated, 1966), p. vii.

[4] Ibid.

always the ultimate problem.[1]

Curiously enough, it is Irish Lemon -- a character in the first novel which contains no Jews -- who is Malamud's spokesman for the entire suffering philosophy. In a conversation with "the natural," she wisely states the author's own attitude towards suffering:

> "What beats me," he said with a trembling voice, "is why did it always have to happen to me? What did I do to deserve it?
> "Being stopped before you started?"
> He nodded.
> "Perhaps it was because you were a good person."
> "How's that?"
> "Experience makes good people better." . . .
> "How does it do that?"
> "Through their suffering."
> "I had enough of that," he said in disgust.
> "We have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness."[2]

Iris also tells Roy that suffering teaches us to want the right thing.[3] Through Iris's speech, Malamud directly conveys the idea that the experience of suffering enables men to become better, and additionally, it brings men closer toward happiness.

Although Iris is the spokesman, Malamud's Jewish characters particularly demonstrate the necessity and acceptance of suffering. They are not affluent, intellectual, successful Jews, instead they are those bearing up the Law amid hopeless poverty and social isolation. The pursuit of parnosseh (livelihood) is an endless combat with only

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[1] Klein, op. cit., p. 165f.

[2] Bernard Malamud, The Natural ("Time Reading Program Special Edition;" New York: Time Incorporated, 1966), p. 156f.

[3] Ibid., p. 157.

defeat in sight. For them the world is not the beginning of things; it is a response to the overmastering reality -- the eternal struggle and the estimable privilege of being a Jew.[1] In a eulogy for Morris Bober, the materially defeated grocer of The Assistant, a Jewish rabbi prays:

> 'Yes, Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered with the Jewish heart.' . . . He followed the Law which God gave Moses . . . He suffered, he endu-red but with hope.[2]

Suffering is the means used by Malamud's Jews to attain moral satisfaction and the other world. It is a necessity which other, more worldly, men are reluctant to accept. But suffering for these Jews is not a creative choice.[3] It is a choice bound deeply with the Jewish history of suffering; it is bolstered by endurance and hope. Like all of his heroes, they are persons

> ...who are of a thoughtful turn, when they reach their highest awareness, in whatever particularities of situation, either cry or, what is the same thing, take upon themselves a deliberate regiment of self-punishment, and the significance of their suffering is always the fact that it is larger than any particularity of situation.[4]

Malamud's Jewish characters know that in order to re-unite themselves with man and God, they must acknowledge man's common bond of suffering. They accept the necessity of mutual atonement as well as

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[1] Kazin, Contemporaries, p. 278.

[2] Malamud, The Assistant, p. 229.

[3] Klein, op. cit., p. 252.

[4] Ibid., p. 263.

contrition and penance brought about through suffering, not only for themselves but for all men. One of these Jews, Ida Bober, the grocer's wife, when asked why she cries and suffers replies, "Why do I cry? I cry for the world. I cry for my life that it went away wasted. I cry for you."[1] Her answer is somewhat of a counterpart to her husband's, when asked if Jews suffer more than they have to, "If you live you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want. But I think if a Jew don't suffer for the Law, he will suffer for nothing. . . . I suffer for you . . . I mean you suffer for me."[2] This Jewish man and his wife are but two of Malamud's characters who are awakened to the necessity of suffering for the life of the spirit and morality and to the acceptance of suffering as the means to that end. The movement of Malamud's Jews, as it is for all his characters, is one of compulsive urgency to be out of this world and into a more certain felt reality.[3] Their adventures proves to be precisely their frustration; the end of straining and the beginning of heroism is the beginning of acceptance.[4]

The redemptive nature of suffering is another feature of Malamud's attitude toward suffering. It is his conception that through suffering man is afforded the opportunity of spiritual and moral rebirth.

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[1] Malamud, The Assistant, p. 145.

[2] Ibid., p. 125.

[3] Klein, op. cit., p. 264.

[4] Ibid.

Suffering in this redemptive role offers regeneration of the spirit and a reaffirmation of values in men. This peculiar transforming power of suffering is man's salvation because it is the means to the attainment, or reattainment, of self.

In the novels of Bernard Malamud, the idea of redemption and resurrection through suffering serves as the imaginative impulse.[1] Each novel follows the hero through a series of trials and records his history of suffering. Each novel brings the hero to the moment of his redemption and resurrection, at which point the novel ends. One conclusion that has been drawn is that Malamud

> writes parables of possible regeneration of self, and in the various illusory contexts he explores the possibilities of the common life. The goodness of his heroes -- not innocence but goodness -- is timeless; their patient virtues, their sufferings, their attempts to touch could shine in any limbo, any dim suspended state of existence.[2]

The possibilities of regeneration and the common life are always seen more vividly at the end of each Malamud novel. Indeed, it is obvious that Malamud displays an affinity for the theme of redemptive suffering.

The earlier novels, The Natural and The Assistant, and the later ones, A New Life and The Fixer,

> ...are about the experience of re-birth, in each of them a prematurely oldish young man, whose earlier life is cloaked in darkness, but has included a dismal or tragic experience of failure, is given a second chance to make something of his life and redeem his disreputable

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[1] Steven Marcus, "The Novel Again," Partisan Review, XXIX (Spring, 1962), 185.

[2] Featherstone, op. cit., p. 96.

past.[1]

First one and then the other of Malamud's heroes are pushed by suffering into recognition. This recognition enables them to redeem their lives and build better ones. The action of the novels rushes with the heroes "to the moment of luminous suffering," when suffering shines forth as the way to love, goodness, and life.[2]

Roy Hobbes, "the natural," is given his second chance in the form of Iris Lemon, the young grandmother, who holds out the promise of love, family, and home to the defeated hero. Frank Alpine's redemption is his conversion to Judaism the faith of the grocer to whom he had been an assistant. A New Life's Seymour Levin receives his second chance, oddly enough, in manfully standing up to the responsibility of a second-hand wife and her adopted children. Yakov Bok, "the fixer," also receives his second chance, if not his freedom, when he leaves his prison cell with definite convictions about life and faith in himself and in something beyond himself. In each case, self-discovery hard-won by suffering brings about a spiritual rebirth, and with it a chance to make choices for a better second life.[3] As the title of the third novel suggests, "a new life" is offered the heroes through the redeeming grace of suffering. The story of the individual's suffering and his spiritual regeneration is the story in the four novels. It is the story

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[1]Marcus, loc. cit.

[2]Klein, op. cit.

[3]"Editors' Preface," The Natural, p. vii.

> ...of the hero who becomes heroic either by rising to acceptance of moral obligation or descending to it, but in either case he proceeds from the comfort of some more certain contemplation. It is at that point that Malamud's story typically ends. . . . The moral act, no matter what moral act it is, is itself charged with significance because any moral act is difficult and unlikely business to accept ordinary humanity. The urgency of the awakened spirit is to soar.[1]

Significantly, all of Malamud's heroes come to be"awakened" spirits. Their awakening is their redemption; their redeeming grace is their suffering. As one critic has so aptly phrased it, "The limits of responsibility, the dignity of suffering, the price of failure these define the ironic meaning of redemption."[2]

One of the best illustrations of Malamud's "awakened spirit" is Seymour Levin because in his search for a new life, he both rises to moral obligation and descends to it. Prior to the opening of the novel, Levin awakes from a drunken daze and faces the responsibility of being a man of principle. Later in his story, he descends from idealized dreams of a better existence to a real hope for a better life with a married woman. At a point late in the narrative, Levin confesses to Pauline Gilley about his rise from a meaningless existence:

> I lived in self-hatred, willing to part with life. I won't tell you what I had come to. But one morning in somebody's filthy cellar, I awoke under burlap bags and saw my rotting shoes on a broken chair. . . . I stared at the chair, it looked like a painting, a thing with a value of its own. I squeezed what was left of my brain to understand why this should move me so deeply, why I

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[1] Klein, op. cit., p. 252f.

[2] Hassan, "The Character of Post-War Fiction in America," English Journal, LI (January, 1962), 5.

> was crying. . . . I came to believe what I had often wanted to, that life is holy. I then became a man of principle.[1]

Levin with the moment of recognition lifts himself to the occasion becoming as he says a "man of principle." Although he stops drinking, he continues unhappy:

> Just when I thought I discovered what would save me -- when I believed it -- my senses seemed to die, as though self-redemption wasn't possible because of what I was -- my emptiness the sign of my worth. I denied the self for having denied life. I managed to get and hang onto a little job but as a person I was nothing. People speak of emptiness but it was a terrifying fullness, the soul has gas. It isn't exactly apathy, you have the feeling it's buried six feet. I couldn't respond to my experience, the thought of love was unbearable. It was my largest and most hopeless loss of self before death.[2]

Even though Levin undergoes a significant moral and emotional experience, he does not find immediate connection with life. He suffers from a loss of self, and with it a bloated feeling of empty fullness. Strangely enough, what finally brings about his total redemption is his descent to assume the responsibility of another man's family. He allows himself first to love, then to accept obligation. He takes Pauline Gilley away from the Cascadia community and from her lawful husband, who angrily queries,

> An older woman than yourself and not dependable, plus two adopted kids, no choice of yours, no job or promise of one, and other assorted headaches. Why take that load on yourself?[3]

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[1] Malamud, A New Life, p. 201.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 360.

And with all the force of his soaring awakened spirit, Seymour Levin manfully replies, "Because I can, you son of a bitch."[1]

Suffering's universal quality is the final aspect of Malamud's attitude toward his theme. According to this idea, suffering is perceived as the common bond uniting all men. Jews and gentiles alike bear the yoke of suffering. Although some men suffer more and others less, all men suffer. Suffering, then, is a universal reality, a consequence of the initial fall from grace. In a portion of the narrative in The Assistant, Malamud concludes, "The world suffers."[2]

Malamud tends to concentrate on the Jew as a symbol of suffering mankind. Two of his four novels (The Fixer and A New Life) have heroes who are of Jewish extractions. Another (The Assistant) deals directly with the Jewish experience of suffering and portrays the conversion of a goy to Judaism. In three of the novels, a Jew -- or a convert to the Jewish faith -- is the symbolic Everyman. Malamud uses the Jew to depict the capacity for suffering which all men have, but which Jews historically are known to have. One of Malamud's characters, Shmuel of The Fixer, voices the author's own belief that the Jew's world is a miniature of the larger world. This old Jew wisely says, "What's in the world . . . is in the shtetl -- people, their trials, worries, circumstances."[3] Thus, Malamud utilizes his Jewish characters.

Though he loves his Jewish people, Malamud loves all

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Malamud, The Assistant, p. 7.

[3]Malamud, The Fixer, p. 12.

humanity.[1] However, he skillfully explores what Sam Bluefarb calls the Jewish "vulnerability both of body and soul to the vicissitudes of foul fortune."[2] In so doing, he also utilizes in his fiction the common plight of Jews (suffering) and their common humanity (suffering).[3] Ultimately, he transfers his local knowledge and extends it to a universal level. Thus, he transcends mere Jewishness to give universality to his theme of suffering. What Malamud has done is to comprehend successfully

> the possibilities of the common life: It is that Malamud has always aimed at a fiction with universal significance. All along he has tried to transcend the Jewish world . . . He says that all men are Jews because he would like to write about all men.[4]

And so it is that the loneliness and suffering of his Jews characterize their position in the common life of all humanity and not their Jewishness.

To the author, just as his Jew is Everyman, every man is a Jew because Malamud believes in the universal quality of suffering which is a bond uniting all men in a common humanity. One character, Frank Alpine, sardonically hints at Malamud's attitude toward the universality of suffering when he makes the conjecture, "Suffering . . . is

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[1] Henry Popkin, "Jewish Stories," Kenyon Review, XX (Autumn, 1958), 641.

[2] Sam Bluefarb, "Bernard Malamud: The Scope of Caricature," English Journal, XXIII (July, 1964), 319.

[3] Ibid., p. 320.

[4] Featherstone, op. cit., p. 96.

like a piece of goods. I bet the Jews could make a suit of clothes of it. The only funny thing is that there are more of them around than anybody knows about.[1] In spite of his predominance of Jewish characters and settings, Malamud never forgets the lot of all humans. He may very well have all men in mind when his fixer intones, "Your afflictions were from life -- a poor living, mistakes with people, the blows of fate. You liveed, you suffered, but you lived."[2]

Malamud's attitude toward suffering, therefore, encompasses both the Nebraic and the Christian views, but it is distinctly his own. His is much more humanistic. Whereas the Christian attitude sees temporal suffering as a means to attain heavenly reward, Malamud's view offers no other-worldly payment for suffering in this life. Christian asceticism glorifies suffering for its merit in heaven. In Malamud's ethics, the value derived from suffering lies in its ability to lead men to live better lives and to make the world a better place in which to live. His characters, Jews and Christians alike, endure suffering because they must, not because they desire to. Each Malamud hero is a unique, though imperfect, person who possesses the larger possibilities of redemption. Each is both good and bad; each has the potential to be better than he is. For each hero full self-realization as man requires full apprehension of suffering, responsibility, and faith in mankind. Thus, Malamud profoundly focuses on these terms and appraises his heroes in these terms.

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[1]Malamud, The Assistant, p. 231.

[2]Malamud, The Fixer, p. 330.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a descriptive analysis of several ideas bearing on Malamud's concept of suffering. These have been identified as the inevitability, necessity, and the acceptance of suffering and as the redemptive nature and the universal quality of suffering. In total, these five parts work together as a consolidated whole to present Malamud's complete viewpoint toward the theme of suffering as seen in the four novels. These features of Malamud's attitude thus formulate his basic ideology which underlies the textual manifestations of the suffering theme treated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE THEME OF SUFFERING

Bernard Malamud's four novels stand as testimony to his affinity for the theme of suffering. Dating periodically from 1952 to 1966, they demonstrate the author's ostensible concentration on the problem of suffering as a raw material to be reworked in numerous, sundry settings and restated by many, varied characters. Malamud's novels, moreover, illustrate the great diversity and effectiveness of his thematic statement of suffering. This chapter will deal with the manifestations of suffering in The Natural (1952), The Assistant (1957), A New Life (1961), and The Fixer (1966).

The theme of suffering is presented in a basic pattern in each work. A hero of lowly origin and multifold deprivations struggles through the vicissitudes of life even though he encounters staggering obstacles to material success. The rate of the decline of his worldly favors and tangible achievements is in direct proportion to the rise of his moral significance and spiritual understanding. The individual's power of regeneration usually lies dormant throughout his formative years during which he is estranged from the typical family circle. Each hero of suffering is worldly wise but not world-weary. He is introduced just as he is on the threshold of a meaningful experience from which a better life is anticipated. However, on the edge of regaining faith and hope in life's possibilities, the hero is, at the same time, on the verge of losing both. Climactically through suffering, he

learns to assume responsibility in life and to reaffirm his manhood in society. He matures into an old-young person and emerges a man of new stature. The hero's story ends just after he has made his commitment to building a better life from the knowledge engenered by suffering. What will happen to him thereafter is never predicted, but his future seems hopeful.

This pattern seemingly reflects Malamud's sense of the moral dilemma of all men and his belief in the regenerative power of suffering. Time and again, Malamud has reiterated his concern for man's condition and his faith in mankind. In a 1966 interview, he declared, "My work, all of it, is an idea of dedication to the human. That's basic to every book. If you don't respect man, you cannot respect my work. I'm in defense of the human."[1] Thus, Malamud has chosen to believe in man, and he offers a hope for humanity in his works. In a more detailed discussion of this same topic, the author avers:

> I am quite tired of the collossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day. . . . Whatever the reason, his fall from grace in his eyes is betrayed by the words he has invented to describe himself as he is now: Fragmented, abbreviated, other-directed, organizational . . . The devaluation exists because he has accepted it without protest.[2]

Malamud does protest. He attempts to lift man from this "devaluation" of himself. He has man learn through the experience of suffering to become man again. He outlines his task (and that of any writer)

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[1]Hanskel Frankel, "Bernard Malamud: An Interview," Saturday Review, XLIX (September 10, 1966), 39f.

[2]Granville Hicks, "Literary Horizons," Saturday Review, XLVI (October 12, 1963), 32.

as that of recapturing man's image as human being "as each of us in his secret heart knows it to be, and as history and literature have from the beginning revealed it."[1] What Malamud maintains is a deep and abiding faith in man's possibilities despite man's limitations. Malamud's profession that man can be better than he is finds expression in his fiction which is concerned with the redemptive powers of suffering. This is what prompts Sidney Richman to write the following:

> Malamud has dedicated himself to tending the resources of the human personality . . . Despite the evidences of his and our own senses, he manages to affirm man, to find the vision through which the elusive and enigmatic sense of life's possibilities counters (all reality to the contrary) man's fall from grace. Through his portrait of a people engulfed and tortured by barbarities past and present, he has found the means to regain something of the tragic vision of the past which insists that where there is hope man will continue to hope, where the spirit cannot endure it will continue to endure.[2]

And hope is precisely what Malamud's characters cling to. They endure all with the hope of better things to come. What they suffer in the process leads them to utilize those "resources of the human personality." Accordingly, what a Malamud story reveals is the "how" involved in achieving something better. That "how" answered is suffering. Thus, through the creation of situations, locales, and characters, Malamud demonstrates that suffering is the means to a better life -- better morally and spiritually.

The earliest treatment of suffering is found in The Natural; though not as pronounced as in the later novels, it follows the basic

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[1]"Editors' Preface," The Natural, p. vii.

[2]Richman, Bernard Malamud, p. 145.

pattern. Roy Hobbes is the hero whose tragic career as a baseball player is recounted in a language that is deeply moving. From the beginning Roy's story is a complex catalogue of suffering relating his physical and spiritual failings in life.

In a type of prelude entitled "Pre-Game," Roy is introduced as a youth of nineteen setting out for a try at major league ball. Behind him are memories of a sad, orphaned childhood; before him are dreams of a bright, successful future. Even before he leaves the train carrying him to his destiny, dark omens foreshadow that future. In an exhibition of his ability, Roy strikes out Walt "Whammer" Whambold, an aging ballplayer who discovers at the height of his career that success is short-lived because some youth, like Roy, is capable of claiming his place. During that same exhibition, Roy fatally wounds his mentor, Sam Simpson, a has-been baseball great whose hopes were to make it big again through Roy. Undaunted by these events, Roy arrives in the city to make a name for himself in the game. However, the end of his first night -- and of "Pre-Game" -- finds him cut down by fate in the form of a silver bullet from the gun of a demented woman, Harriet Bird.

The author does not stop at this point to explain the significance of these events to the reader. But he does create an atmosphere of tragedy for his theme. Consequently, the reader realizes after the opening section that The Natural is no simple baseball yarn. There is evident a lively interplay of fancy and illusion with pain and suffering. This mixture of elements is observed by Leslie Fiedler who concludes that in this respect Bernard Malamud is freely using Kafka and

the whole Surrealist tradition.[1] Fiedler labels the special tone of the work a "lonely, absurd maddness."[2]

The account skips the fifteen ensuing years of travel and suffering during which Roy is condemned to fruitlessness and loneliness. What he actually endures in that period of shifting around the country in odd jobs and bush leagues is left to the reader's imagination. Much later in the chronicle, Roy admits that the shame of his life is that his fate somehow has always been the same -- on the train going nowhere with defeat always obscuring his goal.[3] When next we meet "the natural," he is transformed. He has learned what it is to suffer, but he has not learned from suffering.

In the "Batter-Up" section of the novel, Pop Fisher, a hard-luck manager, introduces the setting and the team that involves Roy once again in the world of baseball. The manager of the New York Knights, Pop decides to give Roy a chance with his team which is in last place in the league. He also laments his lot and cries, "I shoulda farmed instead of playing wet nurse to a last place dead-to-the neck ball team."[4] His words are wasted, however, on a dusty field, an uninterested dugout and half-empty grandstand. Pop sighs much for himself as he says to all who would listen, "My heart feels as dry as dirt for the

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[1] Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in The American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 469.

[2] Ibid., p. 470.

[3] Malamud, The Natural, p. 156.

[4] Ibid., p. 39.

little I have to show for all my years in the game."[1] Pop Fisher, like many of Malamud's supporting characters, represents a sufferer who magnifies and echoes the pitiful existence of Roy Hobbes, a rookie at thirty-four who is far past his prime.

From the start of his career with the trouble-prone Knights, Roy is an outsider. He is the object of "practical" (actually cruel) jokes perpetrated by Bump Bailey, the clown-star of the team. Roy is cheated out of a just salary by Judge Goodwill Banner, the falsely sanctimonious owner of the Knights. He is also hated and tormented by the evil, fiery beauty, Memo Paris. He is haunted by Max Mercy, the suspicious sportswriter who tries to uncover "the natural's" secret past. He is heckled and cursed by Otto Zipp, a strange, twisted dwarf. Thus, Roy lives on the fringe of society.

The success which he craved so desperately and so long seems out of his reach until his chance comes through the ironic death of Bailey in the outfield. Bailey's accident opens a position for Roy who immediately begins a record-shattering career that moves the Knights from last to first place. His new found success is brief and fleeting, as indeed it must be for every Malamud hero-sufferer. Roy goes through a slump, thereby increasing his estrangement from the world and multiplying his suffering. It seems as though he can obtain nothing in life. A coveted place in the baseball hall of fame is the farthest from his reach.

Just as "the natural" is about to lose all hope in life's possibilities, a woman mysteriously enters his life. Amid the crowd of

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[1] Ibid.

baseball fans, a lone woman stands giving Roy the sign of victory and inspiring him to come out of his slump. His homemade bat, Wonderboy, comes alive, and Roy is once more the slugging hero.

This woman, Iris Lemon, changes Roy's life. When they meet, she confesses, "I hate to see a hero fail. There are so few of them . . . . Without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go."[1] Iris sees Roy as a hero; what is even more important, she sees him as a man who has experienced suffering:

> She remembered standing up in the crowd that night, and said to herself that she had really stood up because he was a man whose life she wanted to share . . . a man who had suffered.[2]

Iris holds out to Roy the promise of that which he had never experienced, love and faith.

For the first time in his sad life, Roy tries to talk about his life, his past and his future. It is a rather difficult task because "talk about his inner self was always like plowing up a grave yard."[3] That inner self, however he does reveal to the wise, sympathetic woman:

> "Everything came out different than I thought. . . . My goddamn life didn't turn out like I wanted it to. . . . I wanted everything . . . I had a lot to give this game."
> "Life?"
> "Baseball. If I had started out fifteen years ago like I tried to, I'da been the king of them all by now."
> "The king of what?"
> "The best in the game," he said impatiently.
> "She sighed deeply. "You're so good now."

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[1] Ibid., p. 153.

[2] Ibid., p. 159.

[3] Ibid., p. 154.

> "I'da been better. I'da broke every record there ever was."
>
> "Does that mean so much to you?"
>
> "Sure," he answered. "It's like what you said before. You break the records and everybody else tries to catch up with you if they can." . . .
>
> "But I don't understand why you should make so much of that. Are your values so -- "
>
> "That way," he continued, "if you leave all those records that nobody else can beat -- they'll always remember you. You sorta never die."
>
> "Are you afraid of death?"[1]

But Toy ignores Irish's penetrating question; he continues with the tale of his youthful adventures and the silver bullet that interrupted his career. He fails to understand the woman's gentle probing of his values.

With a wisdom gained from her own experience of suffering, Iris Lemon tries to help Roy learn from his experiences. She explains that suffering makes good people better.[2] Out of the pain of her own life (she had been an unwed teenage mother, and at thirty-three she was a grandmother), Iris draws a succinct conclusion which she presses on Roy. "We have two lives . . . the life we learn with and the life we live after that," she says.[3] "Suffering is what brings us toward happiness."[4] Iris's words fall on deaf, uncomprehending ears. Roy does not yet have the ability to understand suffering. Consequently, he is not ready for the redemption which would move him to a better life.

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[1] Ibid., p. 154f.

[2] Ibid., p. 157.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

He cannot leave the quest for the realization of his selfish materialistic dreams for the true quest for a better moral life. His answer to Iris is a refusal of her ideas and a rejection of her offer of love.

Returning to the wicked world of Memo Paris and her gambling friends, Roy suffers a detachment from reality. He loses himself in dissipation. He gorges himself with food in a desperate, gluttonous attempt to satisfy his insatiable, spiritual hunger. Finally at the lowest point of deprivation, he allows the seductive Memo to tempt him into accepting a bribe. However, during an unexpected halt in the all-important pennant game, Iris Lemon again comes forward to help save Roy from moral disaster. Roy is pulled one way by evil personified in Memo and the opposite way by good, Iris Lemon. Good is victorious because Iris presents Roy with the surprising announcement of her pregnancy. They converse:

> "Darling," whispered Iris, "win for our boy. He stared at her. "What boy?"
> "I am pregnant."
> "Holy Jesus . . . " Bending over, he kissed her mouth and tasted blood. He kissed her breasts, they smelled of roses. He kissed her hard belly, wild with love for her and the child.[1]

With this action, Roy Hobbes accepts the responsibility of love and fatherhood. He has been pushed by suffering into recognition. His acceptance of Iris Lemon is a sign of moral acceptance. Marcus Klein expresses the same idea when he says, "Suffering is the sign, and Iris's wisdom . . . is therefore finally not wasted on him."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 227f.

[2] Klein, After Alienation, p. 263.

Although it is too late for Roy to win the game and consequently the pennant for the Knights, it is not too late for him to reconstruct his life and to redeem his manhood. After the final encounter with the corrupt forces -- the Judge, Memo Paris and a gambler -- Roy realizes what Iris meant about experience making people better through their suffering:

> Going down the tower stairs he fought his overwhelming self-hatred. In each stinking wave of it he remembered some disgusting happening of his life.
>
> He thought, I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again.[1]

At the end "the natural" is a man weeping many bitter tears; however, he is not devoid of hope. With the promise of connection in life through Iris Lemon and the unborn child, Roy Hobbes experiences a rebirth which, though not as pronounced as those in later novels, is clearly evident. Relevant to Roy's regeneration, Sidney Richman relates, "It is by the act of succumbing to the good within, by renouncing the demands of the world, that man may find the way to reattain the world."[2] What may be added to Richman's statement is the fact that Malamud uses suffering as the agent which makes man succumb to good and thereby recapture his humanity.

Malamud's second novel is equally as representative. In The Assistant Malamud's concentration on suffering is even more evident. Compared to The Natural, The Assistant is a more complex treatment of the theme. With the omission of the myth and legend of baseball annals, the novel takes on greater significance and effectiveness. Malamud's

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[1] Malamud, op. cit., p. 240f.

[2] Richman, op. cit., p. 27.

technique seems improved in this second novel. The author extends the theme to further involve the lives of minor characters, and he provides the reader with more message-ladened ideas to ponder. "In The Assistant," Irving Howe writes, "it soon becomes clear that one of his impelling motives is to wish to recapture intensities of feeling we have apparently lost but take to be characteristic of an earlier decade."[1]

The history of Frank Alpine is the history of a long-suffering man whose inclinations constantly vacillate between love and hate, good and evil, right and wrong. He suffers in each opposing situation because his personality is not defined morally. Beneath the surface of his loneliness and frustration lies the enduring hope for a better life. How he reaches out for that life is the ironic tale of his suffering, purgation, and rebirth.

The setting for this very human drama is far from the glamour and noise of a baseball park. It is a small, desolate neighborhood grocery run by a poor Jew, Morris Bober, whose last year of life is irrevocably bound to Frank's reaffirmation. Like Roy Hobbes, Frank Alpine is the product of an orphaned childhood and a wayfaring existence. The two men similarly are undisciplined questers after something. Frank has nothing and belongs no place. He can relate his life in a few sentences, and he summarizes:

> With me one wrong thing leads to another and it ends in a trap. I want the moon so all I get is cheese . . . Sometimes I think your life keeps going the way it starts out for you . . . The week after I was born my mother was dead and buried. I never saw her face, not even a

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[1]Irving Howe, A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics (New York: Horizon Press, 1963), p. 92.

> picture. When I was five years old, one day my old man leaves this furnished room where we were staying to get a pack of butts. He takes off and that was the last I ever saw of him. They traced him years later but by then he was dead.[1]

His passing childhood leaves him without roots or ties, but with memories of bad times sprinkled sparingly with good ones. He asks, "What do you expect to happen after all that?"[2] Then he answers himself, "Of course . . . I hit some nice good spots in between, but they are few and far and usually I end up like I started with nothing."[3]

The nothingness so obvious in Frank's existence leads him to rob in order to have something. Ironically, the store which he holds up has nothing to give. Bober, the storekeeper, does not take in enough cash to cover operating expenses. This experience is typical for Frank who explains,

> What I mean to say to that when I need it most something is missing in me, in me or on account of me. I always have this dream where I want to tell somebody something on the telephone so bad it hurts, but when I am in the booth, instead of a phone being there, a bunch of grapes is hanging on a hook.[4]

Frank both suffers and carries suffering with him. After the initial robbery, he continues stealing from his victim. Moved by a genuine, though confused, desire to aid Bober, Frank secretly takes up residence in the grocery's basement where he feeds on milk stolen

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[1] Malamud, The Assistant, p. 36.

[2] Ibid., p. 37.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

from the grocer. When discovered, he begs for a chance to work in the store, a chance for a positive way of life. Indeed he does work diligently repairing as he sells, but his motives are ambivalent. As the Jew's assistant, he is motivated not so much by a desire to do good as by a need to hide wrong. Though guilt ridden, Frank begins to pilfer the cash register. He realizes what he is doing;

> Anyway he could not get out of his thoughts how quick some people's lives went to pot when they couldn't make up their minds what to do when they had to do it: and he was troubled by the thought of how easy it was for a man to wreck his whole life in a single wrong act. After that the guy suffered forever, no matter what he did to make up for the wrong.[1]

Frank yearns for confession, yet he fears it. His spiritual deprivation is recognized, but he is unable to rid himself of it.

Even Bober's undaunted faith and hope in the face of unwarranted poverty does not immediately move Frankie toward the discipline he sorely needs. However, he does observe Bober who struggles to uphold the "Law," the Hebraic ideal of virtue. Frank watches the old Jew rise at six o'clock every morning so that a "polisheh" (Polish) laundry woman might buy her daily breakfast, a three-cents roll. Frank also witnesses Bober crying in sympathy for the paper products salesman, Al Marcus (nearly dead from cancer), and the bulb peddler, Breitbart, whose whole case is in the fact that "he continues to exist within the last severity of fatigue and suffering, at the edge of the void which his very existence postulates."[2] But Frank sneers at all

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[1] Ibid., p. 108.

[2] Ibid., p. 276.

this, and dismisses it with the thought:

> That's what they live for, . . . and the one that has got the biggest pain in the gut and can hold onto it the longest without running to the toilet is the best Jew.[1]

He only sees that for all Morris Bober's goodness, he still has the talent to end up with less at sixty than at twenty.[2] The assistant contemptuously queries,

> What kind of man did you have to be born to shut yourself up in an overgrown coffin and never once during the day, so help you outside of going for your Yiddish newspaper, poke your beak out of the door for a snootful of air? The answer wasn't hard to say -- you had to be a Jew. They were born prisoners. That was what Morris was, with all his deadly patience, or endurance, or whatever the hell it was . . .[3]

Although Frank assesses Morris's situation in terms of his Jewishness, it is precisely Morris's "deadly patience, or endurance, or whatever the hell it was" that promotes the final change in the direction of Frank's life.

In this respect, the assistant's tale is also that of his master. There is no doubt that Morris Bober knows the tragic quality of life. He is the first to admit that he had hoped for much in America but had obtained little. Because of Morris and his bloodsucking store, his wife and daughter have less. His luck follows a continuously downward curve, going from bad to worse. His own life is steeped in suffering which he endures in exemplary fashion. He is an exceptionally good

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[1] Ibid., p. 88.

[2] Ibid., p. 17.

[3] Ibid., p. 87.

man, referred to by Ihab Hassan as an eiron -- the humble man.[1] Hassan calls him more: "He has the endurance, the power to accept suffering without yielding to the hebetude which years of pain induce."[2] Inured to failure, Bober still strives to give suffering the dignity of men who may trust one another in their common woe.[3] Thus Morris Bober is not simply a stereotype of a patiently suffering Jew. He is a true man among lesser men; his virtues magnificently shadow his faults.

Marcus Klein offers this opinion: "Morris's history is one of loss . . . Being a Jew, given Malamud's use of Jewish experience, is ultimately a holding operation."[4] All Bober does, or can do, given his firm beliefs, is to hold on to what little he has. He is a loser, but he does not lose faith and hope in something better. This is what he eventually teaches his assistant.

In a conversation between master and apprentice, the idea of suffering for an ideal of virtue or the Law is brought out:

> "But tell me why it is that the Jews suffer so damn much, Morris? It seems to me that they like to suffer, . . ."
>
> "Do you like to suffer? They suffer because they are Jews."
>
> "That's what I mean, they suffer more than they have to."
>
> "If you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want. But I think if a Jew don't suffer for the Law, he will suffer for nothing."

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[1] Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 163.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 164.

[4] Klein, op. cit., p. 275.

> "What do you suffer for, Morris?"
> "I suffer for you," Morris said calmly. . . . "If a Jew forgets the Law," Morris ended, "He is not a good Jew, and not a good man."[1]

What Frank discovers is that a "good" man remembers and lives with the Law. This discovery frees him to confess his secret crime. His confession frees him to a certain degree, but it is not enough to exonerate him from guilt. However, it is Frank's association with the Jewish experience which ultimately teaches him humility, truth, faith, and hope. It teaches him, too, to reaffirm a desire to make life better than it is.

When Morris dies, ironically catching pneumonia while shoveling the last of winter's snow so the goyim could walk to church, he leaves Frank a legacy of direction and definition. With Morris's death, Frank stops floundering. He transcends his old way of life to take his master's place in every sense. He listens to the Rabbi's funeral sermon for Morris: "Yes, Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered, and with a Jewish heart."[2] These words offer Frank a new possibility for improvement. He assumes Morris's burdens -- his store, his wife and daughter. Though the elderly Jew, as his daughter points out, "made himself a victim," and was "no saint," he instinctively knew "what was good."[3] His goodness by extension touches Frank. In a sort of growing patience and

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[1] Malamud, The Assistant, p. 124f.

[2] Ibid., p. 229.

[3] Ibid., p. 230.

pity, Frank truly learns to suffer. "The suffering he comes to make his own," Marcus Klein tells us, "is the more Jewish because it is pure."[1] In his suffering Frank finds significance and meaning just as he finds experience and the Jewish experience in the store. His suffering if pure because he accepts it freely, and it is constant because, in reality, there seems little chance of relief. After Frank, the Gentile, has taken the place of the old Jewish sufferer for nearly a year:

> One day in April Frank went to the hospital and had himself circumcised. For a couple of days he dragged himself around with a pain between his legs. The pain enraged and inspired him. After Passover he became a Jew.[2]

Through suffering Frank Alpine accepts Judaism, but his formal entrance into the orthodox religion is only a postscript to his prior acceptance of the practical faith of Morris Bober, whose death helped push Frank into the aesthetic of great discipline, the capacity to endure suffering in life. "Frank's conversion," says H. E. Francis, "is important because he discovers -- not alone, but through another human being -- a love conduct which might give meaning to the burden of suffering, to life."[3] Joseph Featherstone echoes the same thought when he observes, "He becomes a Jew, an awkward and inconclusive rebirth, which is the best Malamud's heroes can hope for. Thus, the gentile turns into the ironic Yiddish sufferer with a good heart, a

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[1] Klein, op. cit., p. 268.

[2] Malamud, The Assistant, p. 246.

[3] Francis, "Bernard Malamud's Everyman," p. 94.

broken self, seeking wholeness."[1] Even though Frank Alpine's regeneration may seem awkward and inconclusive, it does occur. Its every occurrence is a significant and an audible statement of Malamud's theme of suffering as a redemptive agent.

In A New Life as in The Assistant, Malamud treats the suffering of a searcher after identity. Moreover, the third novel "attempts to deal with areas of experience that his earlier writing avoided."[2] But like Frank Alpine, Seymour Levin is a hopeful man who is the victim of sorrowful experiences and blighted future hopes. Similar to Roy Hobbes, Levin sets out to reap the benefits of a fruitful career only to harvest the weeds of dark fortune. Levin, following in the hero footsteps of Frank and Roy, is a schlimozel, a man whose dominant pattern changes little and his meager fortune less. Malamud follows his basic pattern in revealing Levin's story. His hero in beginning a new experience suffers the indignity of reversals of an already pitiful existence.

Seymour Levin is introduced as he steps off a train in Easchester, a college town in the Pacific Northwest. He is about to begin a new career in college teaching at Cascadia College, and with that career, he hopes also to start a new life. Early in the novel he says, "One always hopes that a new place will inspire change -- in one's life."[3] From the very opening of the novel, Levin is an alienated man. A New

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[1]Featherstone, "Bernard Malamud," p. 96.

[2]Marcus, "The Novel Again," p. 185.

[3]Malamud, A New Life, p. 17.

York Jew, Levin arrives in the west heavily bearded and conservatively dressed. His appearance contrasts sharply with that of the English professor who greets him at the station. Gerald Gilley is clean-shaven and wears a sports shirt. The awkwardness of Levin's initial appearance predicts what he encounters later.

Levin's first months in Easchester prove to be disappointing. The warm hospitality initially offered him -- especially by Gerald and Pauline Gilley -- turns out to be a sham. Though his colleagues seemingly take great interest in helping him get established, they actually are uninterested and neglectful. The new man is left entirely to himself. Levin concedes, "My life . . . has been without much purpose to speak of. Some blame the times . . . I blame myself."[1] He realizes that his hopes are perhaps too high for his new life, but he does not want to lose that hope in a better existence. He whispers to himself, "I can't fail again."[2] With a desperate determination, he attempts to analyze his situation:

> He was disappointed at how lonely he still was after almost three months in Easchester. Was his past, he asked himself, taking over in a new land? Had the new self failed? He had had invitations here and there, but as Pauline and others had told him, it was tough to be a bachelor in this town. Without a family, you were almost always left out. . . . Each day his past weighed more.[3]

On all sides Levin fails to find communication with society. His students are indifferent, the townspeople unaware. Each day he simply

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[1] Ibid., p. 18.

[2] Ibid., p. 24.

[3] Ibid., p. 125.

retires to the safety and solitude of his rented room. He moans his condition, "My youth, my lost youth."

Levin's feelings of loneliness and estrangement are magnified because of his past as he implies many times. He is a rehabilitated drunk, who had lived in gutters and slums for years. His youth, saddened by the death of first his father and later his mother, is remembered as a series of privations and failures. In his young adult years, Levin had been a derelict. He recalls:

> He had been, as a youth, a luftmensch, sop of feeling, too easily hurt because after treading on air he hit the pavement head first. Afterwards, pain-blinded, he groped for pieces of reality.[1]

For all his gropping for reality, Young Levin has been left wanting and searching. He can never quite reach whatever it is that he desires. He sadly confesses, "All my life I've been engaged in wanting."[2] His history, then, is reflected in his experience at Cascadia.

When his future deems most dim, Levin meets Pauline Gilley in a wooded area of the campus. In a gush of passion, they achieve sexual fulfillment. For Levin it is a moment of release; for Pauline it is a moment of beauty. Their encounter provides Levin with the engagement he so sorely needs. Nevertheless, Pauline's marital status shadows his hopefulness. As they depart the woods, the sun is covered suddenly by clouds, an omen symbolic of what lies ahead for the lovers.

Clandestine meeting follows clandestine meeting. Momentarily the two find great fulfillment in each other, but eventually the strain

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[1] Ibid., p. 127.

[2] Ibid., p. 217.

involved in continuing the relationship presses upon the instructor. Each time he sees Pauline a stabbing pain develops in his posterior. He suffers great physical pain. For that pain there is no relief. Concealing his condition from Pauline, he visits a country physician, who finds nothing wrong with the patient but who speculates that perhaps Levin does not love his wife. The doctor's statement helps to enlighten Levin whose sudden realization is that he had been fighting and denying love. In amazement, he admits his love for another man's wife:

> 'The truth is I love Pauline Gilley.' His confession deeply moved him. What an extraordinary only human thing to be in love. What human-woven mystery. As Levin walked the streets under a pale moon he felt he had recovered everything he had ever lost. If life is not so, at least he feels it is. The world changed as he looked. He thought of his unhappy years as though they had endured only minutes, black birds long ago dissolved in night. Gone for all time. He had made too much of past experience, not enough of possibility's new forms forever. In heaven's eye he beheld a seeing rose.[1]

The great uplifting Levin feels after his discovery is short-lived. Unexpectedly Pauline Gilley stops the affair. Levin waits and waits for some word, some sign from his loved one. None comes. He then goes through what is for him unparalleled mental anguish. He suffers tremendous feelings of lost, of need, of guilt, of emptiness. In a long passage, what Levin suffers is described:

> The bright flags of loneliness furled and flapped in the breeze. He knew it in every size and shape, hard, soft, black, blue, concrete city-type recalled; and woody-leafy country-kind. He had lived in dark small rooms in anonymous tenements on grey sheets amid stone buildings croeding the sky; loneliness tracked him in the guise of

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[1] Ibid., p. 217.

> strangers. In the country it dwelt in the near distance under vast umbrella skies. In the city, compressed; spacious in the country. Space plus whatever you feel equals more whatever you feel, marvelous for happiness, God save you otherwise. God save Levin. He longed for her to share the burden of his incompletion, the cheat of being human; longed for a past that was now memory pickled in regret. The unhappy clever purpose of the disease was to compel him to expel it. It would never succeed. Despite all his exertions to forget her, Levin remembered and desired.[1]

Thus, the spaciousness of his present surroundings serves only to intensify his misery. The reality of his incompletion grows to monstrous proportions.

The choices made in his life are revealed as poor ones. That he had chosen so badly of his own volition to love Pauline increases his pain:

> He could not understand why he chose so badly, why he invariably wound up with just that woman who was most clearly wrong for him, verbotten, bound to bring him to broken bloody knees.[2]

But it is more than his own choice that he blame for his sad condition:

> He saw in the strewn garbage of his life, errors, mishaps, ignorance, experience from which he had learned nothing. He was a man inadequate, in the sense of being powerless to achieve the most meager happiness. He had been left far behind by Purpose -- those chances for self-fulfillment that spring up around the man who is not fortune's fool.[3]

Indeed Levin has learned nothing from his experiences because his in Easchester is a repetition of his earlier life in New York. He has

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[1] Ibid., p. 256.

[2] Ibid., p. 265.

[3] Ibid.

not resorted to drink again, but his inadequacies render him incapable of achieving happiness.

Although the choice has been made and its consequences wrought, Levin, nonetheless, tries to free himself. He reacts:

> To get away from what he could not escape he drove his car on dusty country roads leading nowhere. Sometimes he stopped and shouted in the stillness. . . . He knew that the only way to fight his sadness of spirit was to be among people but he did nothing to be.[1]

He does nothing because he does not know what to do. He admits that

> he wanted most to break through the hardened cement of self-frustration, to live in the world and enjoy it. . . He felt, as always, the need of change -- in and out of himself, but no longer knew where to begin. His life was a sad hash of beginnings.[2]

In spite of all the frustrations Levin suffers, he constantly tries to begin again. Although he calls his life a "sad hash of beginnings," Levin stubbornly persists in beginning anew after each endeavor abruptly ends in frustration. Despite his setbacks, he continues to believe in something better. Even in abject misery, he does not surrender the dreamy ideal of a new life.

Despair, nevertheless, almost engulfs and crushes his spirit. In a moment of self-pity, Levin contemplates:

> After he had endured all he could, there was more: he had in a former existence lowered the threshold of heartbreak. Ah, sweet mastery of life -- if only Levin could. The more he suffered, no matter how frequently or pure his resolution to change himself, the more he suffered. For whatever unknown or unpredictable cause. He did not kid himself, he was his own bad cause, causing what caused him

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[1] Ibid., p. 256.

[2] Ibid., p. 265.

> pain ('which way I flie is Hell; myself an Hell.'); somewhere along the line he had erred, his life gone wrong, wronger. And when Levin erred the result was serious, no matter how often he promised to take life more lightly, less frantic seeking of a hold to throw it with. He laughed seriously and suffered merrily, miserere.[1]

Faithful to the lot of a schlimozel, Levin faces the truth of his life. Nothing seems to change for the better, but he invariably resolves to change. Similar to the general patter established by Roy Hobbes and Frank Alpine, Seymour Levin finally learns from his experiences of suffering. He finds engagement and involvement with life. He writes a critical paper; He challenges his students; he runs for the department chairmanship. As he admits, "Time . . . rained him in the face and change changed against the will. He rose once more to the surface, not the same man but who was?"[2] Consequently, Levin strives to relate his ideals in the real world. In the process, he arrives at a redemption evolving from his suffering. He tells himself,

> I must be humble . . . Humility is its own virtue, sweet, if true. I must be generous, kind, good. . . . For the first time since he had parted from Pauline the world seemed home, welcome. He had, as men must, given birth to it; he was himself reborn. . . . And Levin wanted, still, to be closer to men than he had been.[3]

As men must in Malamud's world, Levin experiences a spiritual rebirth, which he can clearly recognize and which inspires him toward engagement with mankind. Though he suffers fits of rage, depression, and loneliness, Levin welcomes his redemption with humility. His

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[1] Ibid., p. 254.

[2] Ibid., p. 255.

[3] Ibid., p. 272f.

experiences help to bring him in touch with his principles.

After this moral regeneration, it is but one step to reconciliation with Pauline Gilley. There is then the realization that "it was hopeless; he had fled love to dispel her anxiety and misery. He had suffered to free her from suffering."[1] Levin no longer sees a need to flee from love. Since he greatly desires meaningful relationships with other men, he now has the wisdom and courage to accept the responsibility of his love. The earnings from his vicissitudes have been an increase in moral courage. He accepts the duty of Pauline and her adopted children in an effort to find connection with the world and to fulfill the perennial promise of a better life. Though he understands that his involvement with Pauline will entail beginning again, Levin concludes that "he must still love her. Love for her was in him as experience, as valued idea, pleasure received, which he wanted to repeat."[2] His ritual of redemption is thus complete. His progression towards a new life continues but with abundant meaning and definite dedication. Significantly, suffering leads Levin, the idealist, to responsibility in and hope for life, a life filled with meaning in spite of the hardships and difficulties so obviously ahead. His life may not be tinted with rose-colored glasses but even harsh reality, after the experience of suffering, promises more than despair in broken dreams can proffer.

In The Fixer, Malamud conjures a fresh setting for the theme of

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[1] Ibid., p. 327.

[2] Ibid., p. 336.

suffering. Accordingly, he illustrates the diversity possible for his thematic statement. Pre-revolutionary Russia provides the backdrop for Yakov Bok, the central figure. This locale is far from urban or Western America, and it is vastly different. However, the title character follows Malamud's pattern even more closely than "the natural," "the assistant," or the instructor. Yakov's story like those stories of all Malamud heroes is one of redemption through suffering.

Yakov Bok belongs alongside Seymour Levin, the searcher after a new life. Both men in their own ways are idealists who endure multifold suffering to survive as men. Suffering brings both to the lowest ebb of fortune and to the brink of despair. More significantly, suffering bears them up, makes them strong, and pushes them forth from the depths to new heights as men of principle.

The Fixer, conforming to Malamud's basic pattern, is a Russian Jew of humble origin. A poor orphan, Yakov is conditioned to having little in life. Of his background, he remarks:

> Throughout my miserable childhood I lived in a stinking orphans' home, barely existing. In my dreams I ate and I ate my dreams. Torah I had little of and Talmud less, though I learned Hebrew because I've got an ear for languages. Anyway, I knew the Psalms. They taught me a trade and apprenticed me five minutes after age ten -- not that I regret it. So I work -- let's call it work -- with my hands . . . what little I know I learned on my own . . . Not much better than nothing.[1]

Yakov's youthful memories are not happy ones. His child and adolescent years are filled with more deprivations and indigence than those of Malamud's other sufferers.

When first we meet Yakov, he is a dispirited man who has resolved

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[1]Malamud, The Fixer, p. 6f.

to depart the shtetl -- his village and prison -- for whatever the world offers of a better life. He is dissatisfied with the useless poverty and limited opportunity in the Jewish Pale. He speaks bitterly of his existence:

> I fix what's broken -- except in my heart. In this shtetl everything is falling apart . . . half the time I work for nothing . . . Opportunity here is born dead.[1]

Though he has suffered much from the vicissitudes of life, Yakov is still hopeful that the city, Kiev, will offer him a better tomorrow. What he wishes for most of all is work which will pay enough for solid food and good shelter. He does not expect charity nor does he have any to give as he indicates:

> I don't want people pitying me or wondering what I did to be so cursed. I did nothing. It was a gift. I am innocent. . . . I've been orphaned too long. All I have to my name after thirty years in this graveyard is sixteen rubles that I got from selling everything I own. So please don't mention charity because I have no charity to give.[2]

Thus, the fixer expresses his discontent and his misery. He, unlike the other Jewish peasants, does not find comfort in God, religion, and the Law. In fact, he is out of touch with the ancient faith of his fathers. He has lost the other-worldliness which directs and sustains the Jews in the shtetl. He retaliates to the taunts of his father-in-law, "Today I want my piece of bread not in paradise."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 7.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 17.

Yakov's suffering is both physical and mental. Deprived of a happy childhood, he is also the victim of a childless, faithless wife. Trapped in a poor village, he lacks sufficient food to keep his body strong. Surrounded by firm believers in Judaism, he has become estranged from his God. In a world of faith, he is an unbeliever who bitterly intones, "I've been cheated from the start."[1]

The first few miles of his journey leave Yakov with questions about the wisdom of his decision. He had thought that

> ...his spirits would rise once he was out of the shtetl but he felt no relief. The fixer was troubled by discontent, a deeper sense that he had less choice about going than he wanted to admit. His few friends were left behind. His habits, his best memories such as they were, were there. So was his shame. He was leaving because he had earned a worse living . . . than many he knew with fewer brains and less skill. He was leaving because he was a childless husband -- 'alive but dead' the Talmud described such a man -- as well as embittered, deserted one.[2]

Even after he finally reaches the city, Yakov is disillusioned. He finds the very same conditions in the Jewish ghetto as in the Jewish shtetl. When he is almost completely dejected, he is lifted unexpectedly by false hope. The rescue of a Russian anti-Semitic leads to a job in a restricted district of the city. The precarious position of the hapless Jewish fixer eventually causes his arrest for the ritual murder of an adolescent Russian boy. The accusation lacks truth; the prosecution lacks evidence. Yakov becomes the victim of a conspiracy against all Jews. His indictment and trial are postponed indefinitely.

For over two years, he suffers almost unbearable mental horrors

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[1] Ibid., p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 19.

and physical miseries because the Christian Russians around him -- lawyers, policemen, witnesses -- believe in the blood-matzos ritual as a part of the Jewish religion. Yakov becomes symbolically the Christ-killer, and finally he admits, "I am the victim, the sufferer for my people. . . "[1]

During the long months of imprisonment, life becomes progressively worse for Yakov. In the early days, he is allowed to walk about his cell, and he thinks, "To be imprisoned alone was the greatest desperation . . . known. He hadn't the wit, he told himself, to be this much alone."[2] His loneliness is countered in the beginning by a sympathetic investigator. This man voices the faith and hope in humanity which is obviously the author's own. He tells Yakov:

> I respect man for what he has to go through in life, and sometimes for how he does it, but he has changed little since he began to pretend he was civilized, and the same thing may be said about our society. This is how I feel, but having made that confession let me say . . . that I am somewhat of a meliorist. . . . I act as an optimist because I find I cannot act at all, as a pessimist. One often feels helpless in the face of the confusion of these times, such a mass of apparently uncontrollable events and experiences to live through, attempt to understand, and if at all possible, give order to; but one must not withdraw from the task if he has some small thing to offer -- he does so at the risk of diminishing his humanity.[3]

Respect for man and reaffirmation of humanity, two basic beliefs of the author himself, are essential ideas to the Russian investigator.

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[1] Ibid., p. 334.

[2] Ibid., p. 178.

[3] Ibid., p. 173.

It is for those very ideas that he is imprisoned alongside the fixer.

With the loss of the one sympathetic Russian, Yakov's condition worsens. The poor fixer is chained to the wall. He is half-starved, and worse because he is slowly poisoned. Subjected to humiliating bodily searches and countless cruelties, he begs, "Please who needs more? I have enough."[1] But for all his pleas and entreaties Yakov receives only more torture. Much later in agonizing despair, he cries out, "How much more can I stand if I'm already half-dead."[2]

The Russians, however, continue to add more to the fixer's torments because they are determined to implicate all Jews in the ritual murder and consequently to justify another pogrom against all Jews. Prison officials even send Raisl, Yakov's wife, to extract a confession from the sick man. He doggedly refuses and wearily sighs to himself, "There's no bottom to my bitterness."[3] Nevertheless, Yakov's empty days begin to be filled with a determined faith and hope in life's possibilities. He fights to live, to endure, not only for himself but for all Russian Jews. There is a great change within the fixer. This change is evident even as far as his ideas about God are concerned.

Although he still curses the God of the shtetl Jews, he no longer denies that God. He meditates:

> The purpose of the convenant . . . is to creat human experience, although human experience baffles God. God

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[1] Ibid., p. 186.

[2] Ibid., p. 307.

[3] Ibid., p. 289.

> is after all God; what he is is what he is: God. What does he know about such things? . . . Has he ever suffered? How much, after all, has he experienced? God envies the Jews: it's a rich life. . . . That's this God, Yahioeh, the one who appears out of clouds, cyclones, burning bushes, talking. With Spinoza's God it's different. He is the eternal infinite idea of God. This one says nothing . . . If You're an idea what can you say? One has to find him in the mechinations of his own mind. Spinoza has reasoned him out but Yakov Bok can't. He is, after all, no philosopher. He suffers without either the intellectual idea of God, or the God of the covenant; . . . Nobody suffers for him and he suffers for no one except himself. The rod of God's anger against the fixer is Nicholas II, the Russian Tsar. He punishes the suffering servant for being godless.[1]

If the life of a Jew is, as Yakov reasons, rich in experience and suffering, Yakov's life is doubly rich since he suffers without the comfort of the God of the convenant or the God of the intellectuals. Even in his greatest agony, the fixer cannot resort to the faith of his fathers; nevertheless, he retains his faith in man. "He clings to hope," one reviewer maintains, "because he believes in man, not God."[2]

With a growing moral awareness, he resolves to survive. He does not allow his spirit to be crushed. His moral stamina increases with the indignities heaped upon him. Suffering brings him moral insight and moral courage. He learns his identity as man. His human achievement is a great one because he survives all as a human being who believes in himself, in others, in justice and freedom. He believes that "where there's no fight for it there's no freedom. What is it Spinoza says? If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature

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[1] Ibid., p. 240.

[2] Schott, Review of The Fixer, p. 14.

it's the lesser evil to destroy it."[1]

Finally, the fixer leaves the prison for his trial. Yakov Bok, thus, prevails. He survives the supreme ordeal with the conclusion, "You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed."[2] Riding through the streets of Kiev on the way to his trial, Yakov sees people shouting and waving to him. He has not been forgotten. He shouts victoriously to himself, "Death to the anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live liberty!"[3]

The Fixer concludes, like the other three novels, with the redemption of its hero. In this novel, Malamud again moralizes that suffering is the way to spiritual regeneration and moral rebirth. Additionally, he scrutinizes man's soul and proclaims hope as the requisite of life. Webster Schott says that Malamud continues to advocate life over death.[4] Schott further states that through the character Yakov Bok, Malamud shows that man may exceed himself and thereby allay the meanness of life.[5] Accordingly, we leave Yakov at the height of his reaffirmation. Just as in the other novels, the fate of the hero is unknown. There is a large degree of uncertainty about what happens to

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[1] Malamud, The Fixer, p. 335.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Schott, op. cit.

[5] Ibid.

the fixer, but the reader feels certain that Yakov's commitment to life, to faith, to principles, to ideals will endure. Malamud himself admits:

> When I leave him, he is at the next step to commitment. The reason is that he has suffered injustice. What has happened to Yakov and how he changes is the story. But what happens to Yakov after I leave him, I don't know.[1]

Thus, Yakov's story, so like the three stories preceding it, is one of redemption. How he changes through suffering is the experience in the novel. Or, as Granville Hicks advises, "The Fixer is a novel that offers a great experience, first of all a literary experience, but not merely that."[2] It is a greatly human experience which is inspiring because it bares and celebrates man's indomitable soul and his indefatigable will. The power of the experience itself has the "universal" meanings of legend.[3]

This chapter has dealt with manifestations of Malamud's dominant theme in his four novels. The recurring message that through suffering men are able to be born again has been noted. Suffering leads to a sense of values and a code of honor necessary for a better existence in a better world. Malamud seems to construct his situations and characters carefully in order to communicate his theme. He reveals some of the most poignant experiences of human beings -- social alienation,

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[1] Frankel, op. cit., p. 39.

[2] Granville Hicks, "Literary Horizons," Saturday Review, XLIX (September 10, 1966), 39.

[3] Ibid., p. 37.

self-estrangement, solitary confinement, physical degradation, unfulfilled love, unwarranted poverty. Throughout all, the author shows a deep concern for the plight of humanity. His belief that the writer must recapture man's image as human being is prevalent in the novels. He offers his idea of suffering as the road to happiness, the way to morality. At every opportunity in the four works, Malamud reinforces his opinion that only when men have suffered and have learned from suffering will the world again come to see man as man. Malamud never relinquishes his roll as a moralist. Consequently, his novels evidence a vision of dormant goodness within every man. His plots are directed toward awakening that goodness in order that man might live a better life and be better than he is. Malamud's heroes, learning from the experience of suffering, strive for manhood, cling to hope and faith in making this world a better place for humanity. His sufferers, in addition, commit themselves to accept responsibility and love, to fight injustice and estrangement, to maintain principles and ideals. Untimately, through the theme of suffering, Malamud is able to demonstrate how man can recapture his image and reaffirm his humanity.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, the principal purpose has been to show the great significance of the theme of suffering in Bernard Malamud's novels. During the course of the exposition, the origin, meaning, value, and role of the theme have been brought out.

Significantly, the suffering endured by the Jews in the past has, to a certain degree, provided the author with a basis for his conception which recognizes the values of human morality deeply involved in the personal and historical experience of Jewish people. Resultantly, Malamud uses his Jew as a symbolic Everyman and correlates his saddened condition to that of Everyman.

However, Malamud envisions suffering as the plight and ultimately the achievement of all men. The sufferers in his fiction enables us to visualize the bond between such individuals and all men. Through this bond of suffering, the common life of men is acknowledged and accepted, enabling man to move outside his self-preoccupation and into the world around him. Although experience promotes suffering, suffering forces involvement and with it responsibility. Both social involvement and moral responsibility fight the tendencies toward estrangement and isolation so prevalent in modern society. Thus, suffering is instrumental in involving each individual with the rest of humanity.

Further, the author sees suffering as the universal lot of mankind, his vision is not pessimistic. Hope and endurance are the mainstays of his ideology. Repeatedly he presents the idea of the possibilities of life. In his dedication to the human, he views man as capable of

being better and living a better life. Malamud consistently points out the potential that man has for "a new life" of morality and spirituality. Suffering, if understood and utilized, is the way to attain man's lost image as human being thereby utilizing the otherwise untapped resources of the human personality.

Malamud's stories are of the possible regeneration of self. His heroes are sufferers who awake to redemption and resurrection as men. The experience of re-birth, inspired by suffering, is essential in each of his novels. True self-discovery, coupled with moral obligation, is the fate of Malamud's men. Suffering, thus, is the redeeming grace which makes moral and spiritual regeneration possible. Its value, given Malamud's ethical beliefs, is its ability to lead men to better lives in a better world.

On the basis of this study, one might conclude that suffering is the mighty theme in the novels of Bernard Malamud. The author concentrates on many aspects of suffering as a raw material to be reworked and restated. This theme, too, is the most identifiable one, and at the same time, it is the most complex theme in the four novels. Thematically, suffering has a central and an integral role in each work. Because the theme exemplifies and enriches the development and significance of numerous related themes, it might well be considered Malamud's mighty theme. What is more evident is that suffering brings about the plot crises in The Assistant and The Fixer and contributes to the development of the plot in The Natural and A New Life. In each case, suffering is effective and meaningful. In addition, suffering is a basic ingredient in every characterization. Through the variations of

the characters who suffer, the author uses the theme to demonstrate an conscious awareness of the endless metamorphosis man undergoes and the elemental position suffering occupies in man's existence. Thus, suffering is the recurrent, dominant, and consequential theme -- the mighty theme -- in the novels of Bernard Malamud.

It may be concluded, too, that although each work is dense with human meanings, each is progressively a more complex treatment of the theme. The intensity of suffering is heightened in each succeeding novel. "The natural" suffers from partial social alienation and self-consuming ambition, but he has the wisdom of a woman to show him the way to redemption. "The assistant" suffers not only from a lack of moral definition and social involvement, but also from a guilt complex and divided psyche. He has the example and practical faith of a good Jew to lead him toward regeneration. In A New Life, the hero suffers total estrangement from others, as well as incompletion and disillusionment. However, responsibility and love inspire his rebirth. Each of these three are in part responsible for his dilemma; some inner flaw causes much of his suffering. But in The Fixer, Yakov Bok's suffering reaches the greatest intensity. Bok is an existential hero. A man alone, he is a victim of circumstances, of forces over which he has no control. He is out of step with his age, his country, his God, and his heritage. He has no one and nothing to help him achieve moral and spiritual regeneration. Consequently, he suffers more than the other heroes, and his change alone comes entirely from within. Thus, from the first to the last novel, Malamud strengthens his theme and intensifies the hero's suffering.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from the four novels is that Malamud's emphasis on lessons learned through suffering seems to suggest Dostoevsky. This opinion is supported by the views of five Malamud critics. Richard Elman finds that Malamud's sensibility is "East European, Jewish, more at home with Dostoevsky."[1] Alfred Kazin agrees and feels that Malamud's patron saint is Dostoevsky because Malamud seems to follow his example in having his characters always search for meaning in life.[2] Malamud is also linked to Dostoevsky by Irving Howe who recalls that Dostoevsky "foresaw a situation in which the movement of history would drive men into a fearful choice between the risks of freedom and the security of a false collective."[3] Sidney Richman also suggests that Malamud may be indebted to the Russian novelist for his conception of isolation as a mode of inhuman determinism.[4] Finally, Webster Schott, commenting on only one of Malamud's novels, The Fixer, says that the mood is suggestive of Dostovesky since Malamud envisions the single human being as an "instant in history capable of forcing history."[5] Schott continues, "He inquires into the fear of morality and our drive to transcend time."[6] These five critics all believe that

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[1] Elman, "Malamud on Campus," p. 115.

[2] Kazin, Contemporaries, p. 203.

[3] Howe, A World More Attractive, p. 287.

[4] Richman, Bernard Malamud, p. 55.

[5] Schott, Review of The Fixer, p. 14.

[6] Ibid.

Malamud's novels suggest Fedor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). In conclusion, it may well be that Malamud is indebted to the Russian author for some aspects of the theme of suffering.

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